CULTURAL RESHAPING OF THE SELF: INTELLECTUAL INTERVENTIONS OF EMS NAMBOODIRIPAD IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Cultural Reshaping of the Self: Intellectual Interventions of EMS Namboodiripad in the Public Sphere** submitted by **Chanthu S** bearing registration number 12SHPH 07 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publications before submission of the thesis 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:

1. 'Remoulding the Private in Constructing a Public: Periyar's Response to the Gendered Public Spheres' (*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 78th Session, 2017, ISSN No. 2249-1937)

2. 'The Making of a "Public Man": Reminiscences from EMS Namboodiripad's "How I Became a Communist"' (*TAPASAM*, a quarterly journal for Kerala Studies, Vol 18, Issue 1-2, 2021, ISSN No. 2249-9873)

and has made paper presentations in the following conferences:

3. 'Forgotten Lives, Remembering Public: Marking R Sugathan in History' in the online conference, *Decolonizing Archives, Rethinking Canons: Writing Intellectual Histories of Global Entanglements* organised by the Faculty of History, University of Cambridge in March 2021 (international)

4. 'The Modern Body: Outward Marks, Inner Self' at the seventy-ninth session of the *Indian History Congress*, Barkatullah University, Madhya Pradesh in February 2019 (national)

Further, the student was exempted from doing coursework (recommended by Doctoral Committee) on the basis of the following courses passed during his M Phil programme (2010-2012) at the Department of History, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad and the M Phil Degree awarded in 2013:

Course Code	**Name**	**Credits**	**Pass/ Fail**
SH701	*Historiography*	4	Pass
SH702	*Historical Methods*	4	Pass
SH703	*Seminar Course*	4	Pass

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DECLARATION

I, Chanthu S, hereby declare that this thesis entitled **Cultural Reshaping of the Self: Intellectual Interventions of EMS Namboodiripad in the Public Sphere** submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Professor Anindita Mukhopadhyay**, Department of History, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. A report on plagiarism statistics from the Librarian, Indira Gandhi Memorial Library (IGML), University of Hyderabad is enclosed with this thesis.

I also hereby agree that this thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

Date: Chanthu S

Hyderabad [12SHPH 07]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preliminary ideas that led to this thesis emerged from an MA course *Social Changes in Modern India,* which I did at the Department of History, University of Hyderabad. The budding interest in the question of intellectuals and the public sphere was explored in an MPhil dissertation by studying two intellectuals from South India, Periyar and EMS Namboodiripad. For PhD, I decided to focus on EMS, a choice primarily dictated by the constraints of language. The aura surrounding EMS, a prominent figure in the pantheon of left political leaders in Kerala, was overwhelming at times. Nevertheless, reading EMS has helped me critically see the history of Kerala, from the present, past and from the times that EMS imagined.

I thank Professor Anindita Mukhopadhyay, my supervisor, for her patient guidance and suggestions at various stages of this work. Ma'am instilled the confidence necessary to gather my scattered thoughts and shape them into a thesis. I acknowledge the support, warmth and patience shown when I was stuck in the labyrinth. I wholeheartedly thank her for the engaging advisory meetings that I keenly looked forward to. It was a delight to witness the making of *Children's Games, Adults Gambits* and I enjoyed reading its draft. And I am also grateful for her friendship.

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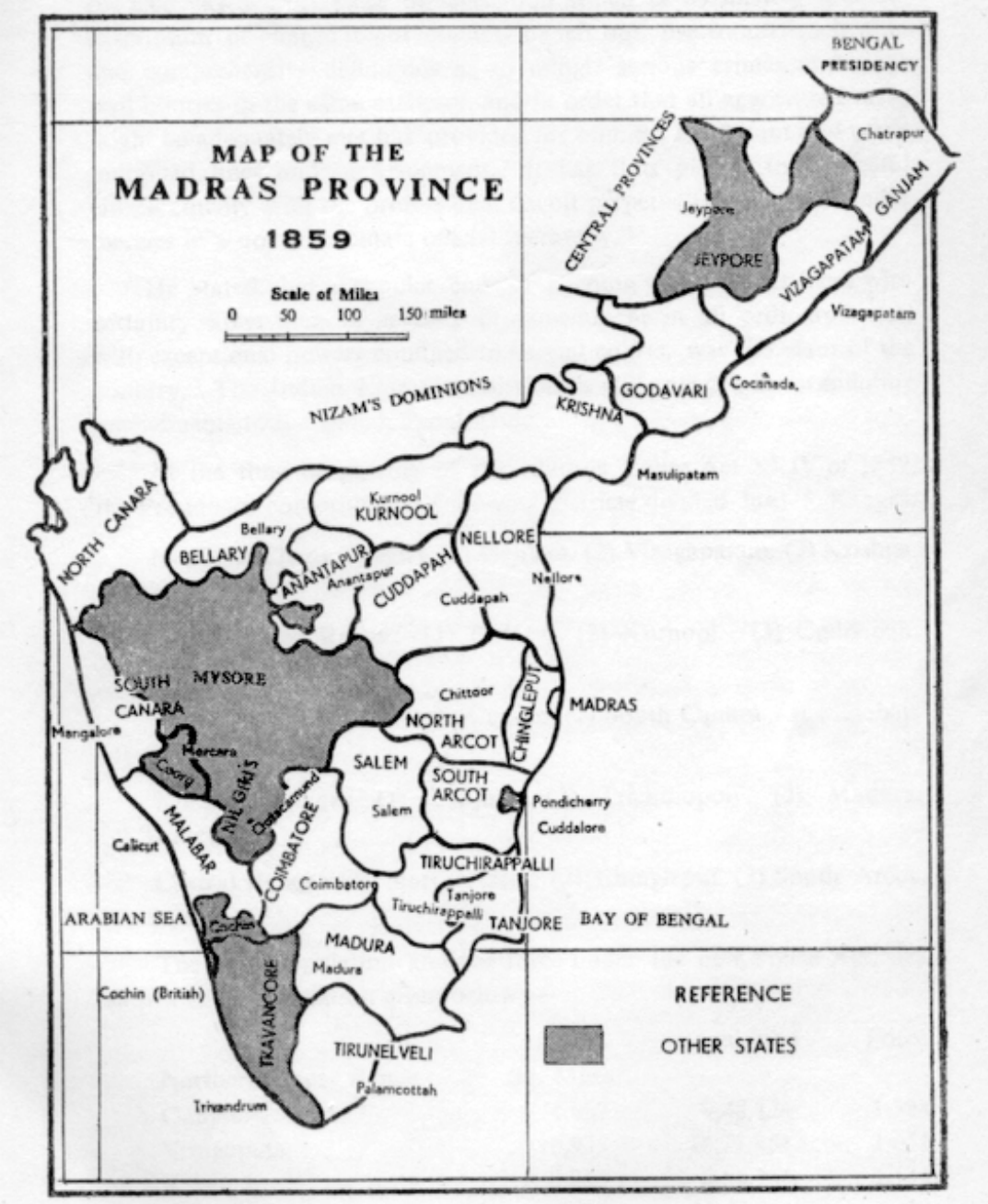
GLOSSARY

adhikari	village headman
adhivedanam	the act of marrying a second wife when the first wife is alive
adyan	the most elite layer of Namboothiris
amshams	a revenue division formed by many *desams*
antarjanam	term denoting Namboothiri women, literally 'the one who lives inside'
anyonyam	Vedic debate/ competition
asyan	Namboothiris who occupied a lower status than *adyans*
bhrasht	excommunication from the caste/ clan
brahmacharyam	the period of celibacy when a Brahmin boy is devoted to the learning of Vedas
brahmachari	one who observes *brahmacharyam*
daanam	gift/ donation
desam	administrative territory
ettu-maattu	set of practices for the removal of different kinds of pollution (*pula*)
ghosha	purdah worn by Namboothiri women
jenmam	term denoting hereditary rights to the land and its produce, redefined during colonial period to mean a private and hereditary ownership of land
jenmi	possessor of *jenmam* tenure; landlord
jenmithvam	landlordism
illam	Namboothiri household/ residence
kanakkaran	holder of *kanam* tenure or lease, mortgage or usufructuary mortgage; one who has leased land from the *jenmis*
kuduma	the tuft of hair marking caste
kuladharmam	duties pertaining to caste/ clan/ family/ tribe

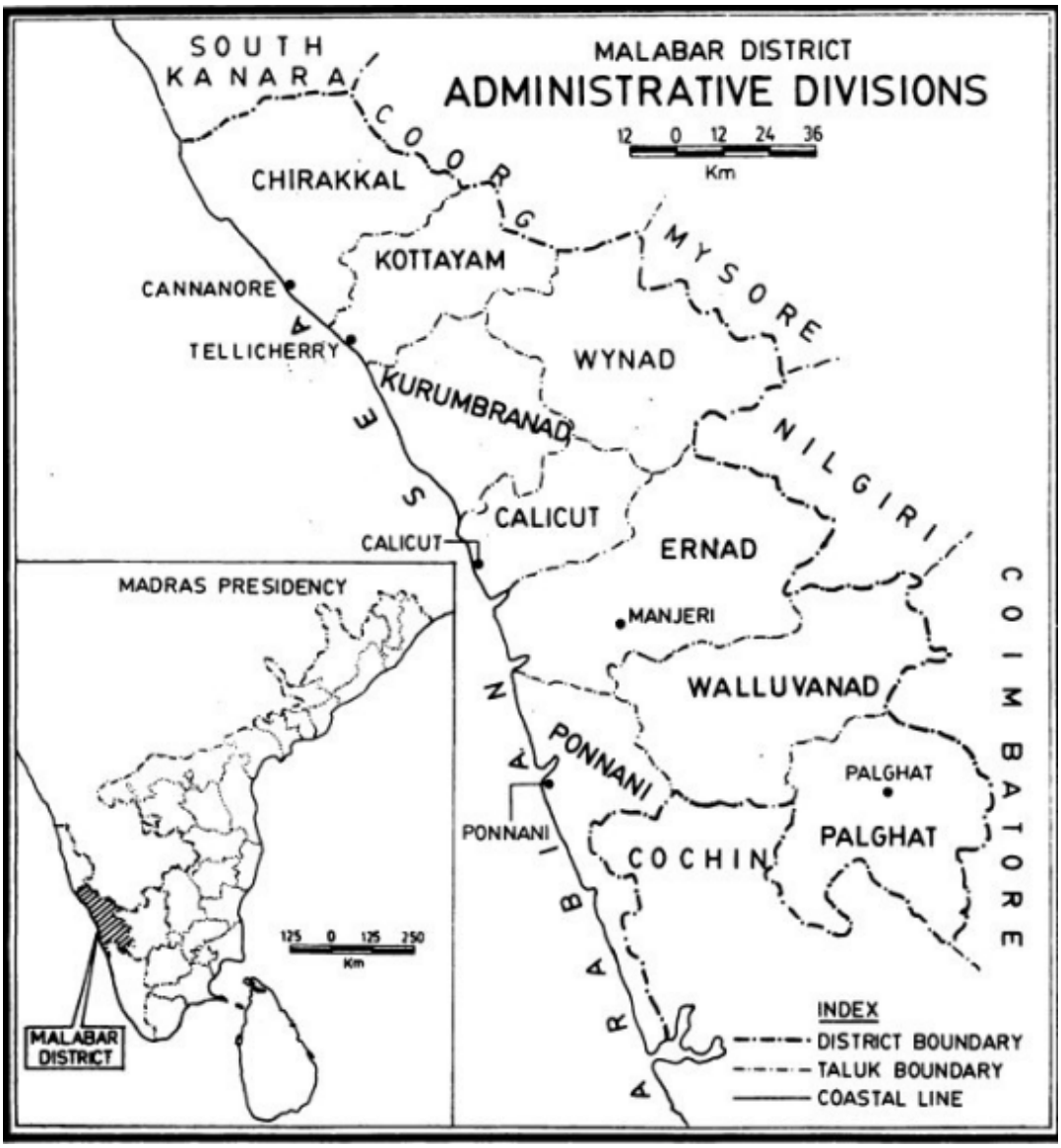
matom	school for teaching the Vedas
mujjanmapunyam	virtue accrued by the good deeds done in previous births
naduvazhi	ruler of a principality
naveenam	new/ modern
othan	term denoting a Brahmin who has mastered the Vedas; hymnologist
parishkaram	a term connoting reform, civilisation, and refinement; modernisation
pazhama	convention/ tradition oldness
poonoolu	the sacred thread worn across the shoulders by male Brahmins after the *upanayanam*
pracheenam	old/ archaic/ traditional
punam krishi	shifting cultivation
samavarthanam	ritual marking the end of the celibacy period of *brahmacharyam* in a Namboothiri boy's life
sambandham	customary marriage between Namboothiri men and non-Namboothiri women of usually Nair castes
samudayam	community
Sasrtic	pertaining to the religious texts (Sastras) of Brahmins
swajatheeya vivaham	the term literally means marriage from within the same caste
swaroopam	dynasty
thamburanvazcha	royal regime
tharavad	household
upanayanam	the investiture ceremony of Brahmins when *poonoolu* is worn for the first time
vakil	lawyer
vargabodham	class-consciousness
varnashrama dharmam	the classificatory system of caste into four divisions — Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra



Map I:

Madras Province

(Source: Wikimedia Commons)



Map II.

Malabar District and its Taluks

(Source: KN Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989)

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

This thesis takes the case of Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad (1909-1999), an intellectual who straddled diverse thinking worlds in the early-twentieth century Kerala and attempted to understand his social and political interventions. There are immense possibilities for locating and interpreting EMS, one of Kerala's foremost political leaders of the twentieth century. Many studies and commentaries have highlighted the role that EMS Namboodiripad (hereafter EMS) played in the larger movement for the democratisation of Kerala society. EMS's contributions to the political project of redistribution of resources and improvement of the quality of life of the people of Kerala have been a significant focus of this scholarship. Departing from this dominant approach, this study focuses on the nature of EMS Namboodiripad's mediation in the Malayalam public sphere by analysing his writings, specifically those between the late-1920s to the early-1950s — a critical period in EMS's public life, marked by various intellectual and ideological departures and arrivals. The analytical categories that EMS acquired in this period significantly shaped the interventions the intellectual made in the public sphere. The study engages only with a threshold compared to the larger corpus of EMS's writings and interventions. I primarily look at the interventions of EMS in the Namboothiri community and the question of peasants taken up subsequently as a Congress Socialist and communist.

There were diverse positions and points of view in the emerging Malayalam public domain, which found new discursive avenues in the print culture of the late-nineteenth century.[1] Here, it is crucial to consider which social groups had access to these domains and, further, to explore the shifting notions of space and locations of the self within it. The research analyses the intellectual interventions of EMS against those temporal junctures where the evolving print culture facilitated new modalities of articulation and enabled individuals and social groups to speak in a modern political

[1]See, for instance, G Arunima, 'Imagining Communities–Differently: Print, Language and the (Public Sphere) in Colonial Kerala', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43, no. 1 (1 March 2006): 63–76.

language of rights, entitlements, and duties. Embodying my broader interest in situating the engagement of individuals in modern Indian society, this study is an attempt to read and interpret the complexities involved in the evolution of an intellectual in the emerging print public spheres in Kerala. The problem dealt with in the study involves understanding how individuals governed (themselves and others) by laying out a seemingly ethical-rational pathway that would allow the transformation of ideas into socially corrective practices. Moreover, the simultaneous development of a modern political language would ground the new practices within these new conceptual categories. This process entails a particular perception of 'truth'. It is essential to place the register of the production of this 'truth' at the heart of historical analysis and political debate.

The thesis primarily studies a few aspects operating at the level of ideas and political practices. Firstly, the intellectual shifts and the corresponding shades of politics in EMS Namboodiripad and the agential roles imparted a distinct and visible form to these shifts. By critically understanding the shifting notions of equality with which EMS engaged, the transformative aspects of the intellectual in the early-twentieth century Kerala are mapped.[2] Indeed, the notion of equality and the different socio-political registers that imparted a dynamic range to its application across variegated social hierarchies was the key to EMS's recast mindscape. These shifts are located by studying how EMS perceives and categorises the issues of concern in the political public domain. Secondly, this work locates EMS Namboodiripad's engagement in the public sphere and highlights how a new grammar of the left ideology evolved through his engagements. Thirdly and finally, through the prism of the aforementioned aspects, the thesis attempts to explicate the cultural reshaping and fashioning of the self in the evolving public sphere and the reconstitution of subjectivities. The present analysis of the processes and their relation to modernity will add to the existing studies on Keralam[3] and the body of work on the fashioning of subjectivities in the public sphere.[4]

[2]The primary query of my thesis is not to look at EMS's notions on the expansion of equality in India. But while mapping EMS's ideological shifts, I do look at his perceptions on equality.
[3]Udaya Kumar, *Writing the First Person: Literature, History, and Autobiography in Modern Kerala*, 1st ed. (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016).
[4]Prathama Banerjee, *Elementary Aspects of the Political: Histories from the Global South*, 1st ed., Theory

The socio-cultural factors that determine the parameters of this study are drawn from Kerala's historical processes unfolding during the colonial period. At this time, due to colonial techniques of governance, clear demographic groupings emerged based on religion, caste hierarchies and occupational patterns. The majority, with a distinct Hindu identity, formed a political public, a process which dovetailed unevenly with communal perceptions about religious 'others', who had emerged, equally clearly, as minority groups during the colonial period. Even after achieving independence in 1947, these troubling legacies of the political majority, ominously emphasised in a Hindu register, created undercurrents of manifold tensions. However, such deep-rooted tensions were kept in check by a self-consciously modern secular consciousness by dominant but numerically small elite groups. Contradictory impulses rooted in the pre-colonial categories of 'community' shadowed the core principles of a modern political consciousness, which in turn, were within western representative institutions and electoral processes. Thus, if we look at democracy as it is on a global scale, it is essential to consider the history of dialogue and intellectual deliberations that have been critical to the growth and spread of democracy in India as much as we study its co-optations by the powerful and associated contradictions that had deep roots within the pre-colonial category of 'community'.

In other words, the research attempts to gain insights into the socio-political practices that went into the making of an intellectual and the role of an intellectual in developing a particular interpretation of society. The study traces the intersecting categories of modernity, the public sphere, and the notions of the self. The absence of the histories of the 'weak'[5] and the ambiguities within the intellectual orientations of intellectuals makes it essential to explore the socio-political contexts that transformed the thought-scapes of intellectuals which in turn influenced their political orientations and actions. EMS thus provides a crucial link to our understanding of our modernity.

in Forms (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2020).

[5]James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, 1st ed. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985).

Frameworks of Self

Scholars consider the increased preoccupation with the idea of 'self' and 'individual' as a distinct aspect of modernity as it unfolded in different social contexts. While the process of individuation is generally posited in opposition to larger society/ community, Charles Taylor argues that the self exists only within 'webs of interlocution'.[6] Accordingly, one cannot be a self on one's own but only in relation to a set of interlocutors in two specific and overlapping ways: the self is formed in relation to those conversational partners essential to achieving one's self-definition and in relation to those who are now crucial to one's continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding.[7] In other words, Taylor points out the importance of the 'social' in marking the 'self'.

The common-sense model of the self, inherited from the Enlightenment tradition, assumes that we possess 'a free and autonomous individuality that is unique to us and develops as part of our spontaneous encounter with the world. The theories of the subject that have dominated the field of literary/cultural studies complicate and contradict this model. Philosopher Nick Mansfield categorises the theories of the self into 'subjective' and 'anti-subjective' positions. The subjective approach is characterised by the assumption that the self is 'quantifiable and knowable …a real thing, with a fixed structure, operating in knowable and predictable patterns.'[8] Mansfield categorises psychoanalytic approaches as belonging to this position. The anti-subjective approach does not assume that the self is a stable category, and that subjectivity is the free and spontaneous expression of our interior truth. Instead, it views the self as an invented category. Michel Foucault's work represents the anti-subjective position. According to Foucault, the idea of a free self is a fiction we are made to believe so that we will regulate and correctly present ourselves. Subjectivity has been invented by dominant systems of social organisation to control and manage us. In short, the subject is the primary site of power.[9]

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[6]Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 36.
[7]Taylor, 36.
[8] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, 1st ed. (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 20.
[9] Mansfield, 10.

At the same time, this study does not assume that the 'self' or subjectivity is a given and stable entity. The self is constantly in the process of constitution and reconstitution. Here I borrow the idea of subjectivation and desubjectivation used by Michel Foucault to understand the process of the making and the remaking of the self in EMS Namboodiripad. A central concern of Foucault's work was analysing how specific 'techniques' or 'forms of power' make individuals into 'subjects', i.e., subjectivation. Foucault defines subjectivation as follows:

> This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognise and others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects.[10]

Foucault attaches two meanings to the term 'subject'. The first meaning connotes 'a form of power that subjugates', wherein the self is 'subject to someone else by control and dependence'. In the second connotation, the self is associated with the form of power that 'makes subject to'. It refers to a state where the self is 'tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge'.[11] Here, we can see that the term subject has both passive and active dimensions. While the first meaning connotes the process by which individuals become subjects of power, the second meaning allocates individuals more space for the making or constitution of the self. Stewart and Roy argue that although the two processes of being 'subject(ed) to' and 'makes subject to' are interrelated, subjectivation emphasises the latter sphere of 'the constitution of the subject *as an object for himself or herself*'.[12] Accordingly, subjectivation refers to 'the procedures by which the subject is led to observe herself, analyse herself, interpret herself, and recognise herself as a domain of possible knowledge'.[13]

[10]Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Power*, ed. James D Faubion, 1st ed., vol. 3, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2001), 331.
[11]Foucault, 331.
[12]Eric Stewart and Ariel D Roy, 'Subjectification', in *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. Thomas Teo, 1st ed. (New York: Springer New York, 2014), 1877.
[13]Stewart and Roy, 1877.

At the same time, Foucault also attends to the 'tensions' involved in the subjectivation process.[14] Termed 'desubjectivation', Foucault elaborates on it while mentioning his intellectual influences and mode of writing. With respect to his intellectual influences ('Georges Bataille, Friedrich Nietzsche, Maurice Blanchot, and Pierre Klossowski'), Foucault argues that 'their problem was not the construction of a system but the construction of a personal experience' which encompasses the idea/ process of desubjectivation.[15]

> …trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the 'unlivable', to that which can't be lived through. What is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time. …the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of desubjectivation.[16]

Foucault's reading of Bataille, Blanchot and Nietzsche, in other words, prompted him to 'question the category of the subject, its supremacy, its foundational function'.[17] What experiential effects did this process of interrogating the subject entail? In Foucault's words, desubjectivation involved an effect wherein 'one would have to experience something leading to its actual destruction, its decomposition, its explosion, its conversion into something else.[18] Rather than the complete annihilation of the subject, Foucault leaves the possibility of the subject transforming into something else through the process of desubjectivation. In other words, desubjectivation can lead to or constitute a new subjectivation. Moreover, the subject may wrench one's self from the given and construct a new self or be subject to a new subjectification process. Foucault not only postulated about (de)subjectivation but stated that his writings embody the process of desubjectivation. For Foucault, books/ history writing projects were 'direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same.'[19] In characterising his works which essentially aim to question the notion of the

[14]Michel Foucault, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', in *Power*, ed. James D Faubion, 1st ed., vol. 3, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2001), 242.
[15]Foucault, 241.
[16]Foucault, 241.
[17]Foucault, 247.
[18]Foucault, 247.
[19]Foucault, 241–42.

subject, Foucault distinguishes between what he calls 'truth books' and 'experience books'. Accordingly, in 'truth books' or 'demonstration books', the claims one makes have to be true or historically verifiable. Truth books are thus aimed at the establishment of historical truths.[20] On the other hand, Foucault calls his works as more of 'experience books' than 'truth books'. Accordingly,

> …my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed. Which means that at the end of a book we would establish new relationships with the subject at issue: the I who wrote the book and those who have read it would have a different relationship with… [the issue in question], with its contemporary status, and its history in the modern world.[21]

Foucault underscores the collective aspect of the 'experience book' in the sense that the book is not just documenting or embodying an experience of the writer; it also makes the experience accessible/ available for others.[22] Experience books, thus, are more like 'invitations or public gestures'.[23] Experience book, therefore, functions as an experience for its writer and reader.[24] Furthermore, this experience results in a change in our relationship with the world and ourselves. An experience book renders specific mechanisms of power intelligible in such a way that the readers come to understand them by detaching themselves from the same.[25] This means that the act of understanding the mechanisms of power also simultaneously has the effect of detaching the reader from the same processes of power. Foucault says that

> This shows that an experience is expressed in the book which is wider than mine alone. The readers have simply found themselves involved in a process that was under way— we could say, in the transformation of contemporary man with respect to the idea he has of himself. And the book worked toward that transformation. To a small degree, it was even an agent

[20]Foucault, 243.
[21]Foucault, 242.
[22]Foucault, 244.
[23]Foucault, 245.
[24]Foucault, 243.
[25]Foucault, 244.

> in it. That is what I mean by an experience book, as opposed to a truth book or a demonstration book.[26]

In other words, an 'experience book' reflects on and may even facilitate the process of desubjectivation, the process in/ through which 'the subject might be able to dissociate from itself, sever the relation with itself, lose its identity'[27] and the accompanying 'search for the entirely-other'.[28]

I use Foucauldian concepts to lay out the self-making projects EMS undertook and demonstrate how an intellectual positions himself along the works he authors and the societies in which he thinks/intervenes. As an intellectual who navigated different ideological territories (community reformism, anti-colonial thought trajectories, socialism, communism) and recorded these sojourns in the public sphere, we can see EMS laying down a 'collective practice' or 'way of thinking' that engages with the constitution and reconstitution of the self. An 'invitation' or 'gesture' to the reading public can be seen in the concluding remarks of EMS's *Aathmakatha* where he shares his hope that the reader will be able to relate to EMS's life story of the transition from a Namboothiri to a Communist.[29] The metamorphosis is laid down by EMS so that he anticipates the accessibility of his experiences of subjectivation and desubjectivation for others. In a way, the thesis looks at the relationship between EMS, the person embedded in a particular social context and how he arrives at opinions about his world. EMS's autobiographical writings, *Aathmakatha* and *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, therefore, are texts that reveal EMS's inner worlds. And it is to be noted that EMS is reflexive only about the early phases of his life. Once he establishes his becoming a communist, which is mainly towards the end of the 1940s, the latter narratives are mainly driven based on the journey of ideology and politics in public. The anxieties, the mental battles to chalk out a pathway, are erased through a retrospective reconstruction of his life.

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[26]Foucault, 246.
[27]Foucault, 248.
[28]Foucault, 249.
[29]E M S Namboodiripad, 'Vazhithirivu', in *E M S Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 304.

Of EMS's voluminous writings amounting to 'more than 100 volumes of 400-500 pages each',[30] this thesis has focused on his intellectual engagements within the Namboothiri community and his endeavours regarding the peasant question in Kerala. Both these interventions had subjective and experiential components. For instance, EMS's writings about the community were more subjective and anxiety-ridden, whereas the peasant's question was more 'demonstrative' of a historical truth he believed in, conditioned by the Marxist framework. In his reflections about his narrative style, EMS alludes to a classification along the lines of 'truth book' and 'experience book'. EMS acknowledges that his autobiography is not an affective account of his life like V T Bhattathiripad's evocative memoir *Kanneerum Kinavum* (My Tears, My Dreams).[31] Nevertheless, it makes available for people who are different from him the story of how a Namboothiri Brahmin immersed within a world dominated by benevolent and malevolent gods and caste transitioned into a communist who jettisoned sacred cosmologies, shed ascriptive social orders and its privileges and rested his inner social fulcrum on equality, secularism and socio-economic and re-distributive justice.[32] The story of 'the 'de-classing of a person hailing from an 'upper-caste', '*jenmi*' background', of how someone born in a 'bourgeois-landlord setting turned into a foster son of Indian working class'.[33] The idea EMS proposes is to make his life experiences available and accessible to others. And in the process transforms the readers too.[34] In other words, EMS's characterisation of his autobiographical writings (*Aathmakatha* and *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakurippukal*) falls within the Foucauldian concept of 'experience book'.

While the autobiographies, especially the *Aathmakatha,* centre the story of his arrivals and departures, subjectivation and desubjectivation till the period marking the beginning of EMS's life as a communist, he declares that the rest of his life story would be an objective account of the communist movement in Kerala. This is because EMS considers his life as inextricably linked to the history of the communist movement.

[30]Gulati and Isaac, "EMS Namboodiripad: Revolutionary Intellectual," 689.
[31] V T Bhattathiripad, *My Tears, My Dreams*, trans. Sindhu V Nair, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013).
[32]Namboodiripad, 'Vazhithirivu', 304.
[33]E M S Namboodiripad, 'Bolshevism', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 12.
[34]Namboodiripad, 'Vazhithirivu', 304.

Furthermore, the task of writing the history of the communist party involves 'facts' and the meticulous use of documents, which is a time-consuming one. This history cannot be based on 'personal recollections'. EMS does not write this history because of the paucity of time and the non-availability of the requisite documents.[35] Here, EMS is talking about chronicling a 'truth book' that places the personal/ the biography as history.

At the same time, we cannot make a neat classification of EMS's writings as either experiential or demonstrative. Even within the autobiographical writings, the account becomes self-narratives of his roles in different junctures in Kerala's history. While providing contextual histories to the recollections, EMS makes clear his positions and vantage points about specific moments in history, such as the Mapilla Rebellion, the Gandhi-Irwin pact, and his changing positions with respect to Gandhi and the Congress. Thus his autobiographical narrative is not an entirely subjective experiential narrative but also contains truth narratives addressed to an imaginary public.

The Realm of Interlocutions and Actions

It is important to note that in post-colonial scholarship, the study of modernity in India has primarily been orchestrated through the dimensions of political life. If politics is shaped through the discernible processes shaped by forces of colonialism and through which people are reintroduced to each other by a different set of values, it is vital to understand the channels through which these shifting social valences were affected. The modern public sphere had a role in these shifting relations, and it acted as a conduit for the engagement of individuals which were performatively diverse. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, India experienced the imparting of new meanings in the realm of politics. For instance, in colonial Andhra, Viresalingam consciously intervened in the public sphere in literary and non-literary modes where he articulated social and political views.[36]

[35]Namboodiripad, 303–4.
[36]Vakulabharanam Rajagopal, 'Fashioning Modernity in Telugu: Viresalingam and His Interventionist Strategy', *Studies in History* 21, no. 1 (1 February 2005): 45–77.

The public domain can also be approached as a space where communities are forced to come together – overcoming their insularity and exclusivity and recognising the need to connect to reconstitute themselves as a public.[37] Bhattacharya has argued that the emergence of the public sphere allowed communities to transform 'internal' matters into public issues and intra-community debates into public battles, forming specific community publics in that very process. Reconstruction of the community thus occurred through debates that were public. The boundaries of the community were defined publicly: the signs of identity were marked publicly, implicating the public in the constitution of new boundaries and the definition of the public perceptions of these communities.[38]

Similarly, Udaya Kumar observes that in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Kerala, the nature of the address performed in newspapers tended to represent a public that did not exist yet: thus, the public was constituted through the very act of address.[39] The constant evocation of the multitude of 'readers' (*vaayanakaar*) who would respond to the reportage in the newspapers demonstrates this. The public as a collective comes into existence when it assumes the position of the subject in relation to public opinion, articulated in print publications like the newspapers. They shape public opinion in a complex relationship of constitution and obedience.[40] In this realm, new meanings emerged that were modern and which worked along the fault lines of temporal and spatial differences within the society. The most crucial aspect of assessing the public sphere is a critical understanding of the possibilities of the emerging public sphere. Individuals can cast themselves as agents as well as opponents of change.

I will look at how certain constitutive goods of the self – in this instance, new notions of freedom, socio-political equality, and progress – were reconstituted under the 'new'

[37]Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public', in *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 130–56.
[38]Bhattacharya.
[39]See Udaya Kumar, 'The Public, the State and New Domains of Writing: On Ramakrishna Pillai's Conception of Literary and Political Expression', *Tapasam* 2, no. 3 & 4 (April 2007): 413–41.
[40]See Kumar. The author looks at the ideas of publicity that runs through Ramakrishna Pillai's interventions in political journalism and literature in Travancore in the early decades of the twentieth century. He observes that the political relation between the state and the people was central to Ramakrishna Pillai's conception of the public, where newspapers stood in a paradoxical relation of representation and constitution vis-a-vis the emergent entity of the public.

public domain. I argue that these ideas gained societal currency and acceptance as the new public domain began to be crisscrossed by ever-growing communication networks. The familiar pre-colonial networks expanded exponentially, and thus the sheer scale or magnitude made debates on continuities and breaks in historical processes inadequate. New social groups using new pathways towards social, political, and economic progress tied to traditionally privileged communication in the new competitive environment of the public sphere. This is what I understand as the conditioning which redefined the notion of the new public. The specific concern here is to study the reconstitution of the individual in the public sphere and the particular rationalities which moulded EMS. My queries take off from the point when EMS fashioned a public domain that would accommodate a kind of rational individuation that was sceptical of traditional hierarchies, practices, and knowledge systems.

The circumstances that define the passage into the modern varied in different locations and temporalities. As it emerged in colonial India, the public sphere cannot be conceptualised as a homogeneous, consensual, unitary space; for, it was deeply segmented in nature. It also reflected a constant state of flux, giving rise to visible permutations and combinations of diverse social groups seeking to give visible shape to their identities. There were different positions and points of view in the public domain which found articulation in the print culture in the nineteenth century.[41] The life-world of individuals in modern Indian society was 'categorically' divided into inner/outer, private/public, and spiritual/material world.[42] It is essential to see how these categories were reconstituted against the pre-modern conditions. In India, the emergence of a modern public sphere was a product of colonial modernity, and it developed in parallel with various political mobilisations.[43]

The research, therefore, draws from the work of scholars who have studied the emergence of the public sphere in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Keralam with 'public interest' as the key concern. J Devika, in her work, identifies the

[41]Arunima, 'Imagining Communities–Differently', 1 March 2006.
[42]Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*, 1st ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[43]Amir Ali, 'Evolution of Public Sphere in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 26 (2001): 2419–25.

individual self which emerges during the period of social and community reformisms of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Malayalee society as an already-gendered entity.[44] In charting the historical and contemporary specificities of the fashioning of the self in the public sphere, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan's work examines the gendered notions that underpin revolutionary subjectivity in the left discourse in the context of Kerala.[45] In a similar vein, Rajarshi Dasgupta studies the idea of left subjectivity by proposing the idea of 'ascetic modality'.[46] According to the argument, the ascetic modality that went into the making of communist subjectivity fashions the body as 'an archive of a very different class' and establishes control of one's desires. There is a constant refashioning of the self in a manner that is available for specific 'techniques of styling' and the 'analytical gaze of self-criticism'.[47]

While this work builds on studies that looked at the constitution of a gendered, masculine self in the public sphere, especially with respect to a left subjectivity, we also need to factor in the role of caste in shaping the same. Dilip Menon has studied the implications of caste in the development of communism in Kerala. While communist peasant movements had radically challenged caste authority in Malabar, Menon shows how the movement also drew from existing idioms and relations of caste and the negotiation of earlier notions of community.[48] Menon's work thus throws light on the predominantly upper caste leadership of socialist and communist movements in Malabar and the resulting caste contradictions. In an article, Menon considered EMS's Marxist historiographical interventions heavily drawing on Brahminical interpretations.[49] The thesis, however, predominantly engages with Aditya Nigam's

[44]J Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-Forming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2007).
[45]Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, 'Masculinity and the Structuring of the Public Domain in Kerala: A History of the Contemporary' (PhD Thesis, Bangalore, Centre for Study of Culture and Society, 2006).
[46]Although Dasgupta's work is set in the context of Bengal, it provides useful categories to understand the fashioning of communist subjectivity. See Rajarshi Dasgupta, 'The Ascetic Modality: A Critique of Communist Self-Fashioning', in *Critical Studies in Politics Exploring Sites, Selves, Power*, ed. Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, and Sanjay Palshikar, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2014), 67–87.
[47]Dasgupta.
[48]Dilip M Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, 1st ed., Cambridge South Asian Studies (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1994).
[49]Dilip M. Menon, 'Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E. M. S. Namboodiripad and the Pasts of Kerala', in *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2011), 32–72.

position that the Marxist use of the analytical category of class in India amounted to the secularisation of caste.[50] The study uses the idea of 'the protean Brahmin self' – that accommodates modernity yet retains caste power – to understand EMS's revolutionary subjectivity.

Methodology

Historians trace an expanding interest in 'life-writing' to seventeenth-century Europe, when autobiographies, journals and diaries that recorded individual lives, thoughts and feelings came to be written in an unprecedented manner. An essential characteristic of this emerging genre was the privileging of an 'individual self' in relation (or opposition) to social institutions like family and community.[51] As far as historians are concerned, the (auto)biography provides a rich source of history writing. Historians identify a 'biographical turn' in history, placing 'human experiences' as the starting point for historical interpretation.[52]

Historians have generally resorted to two broad approaches to autobiography: the 'classical' biographical approach is characterised by an exclusive preoccupation with the life of the individual in question with a minimum focus on the context. In contrast, the second school of thought argues that biography presents the individual life as a 'lens' to understand the events and processes that shape the broader context, the larger historical question or theme.[53] Autobiographies thus present 'subjective understanding and experience' as a key to unlocking the 'general', both the contemporary society and the process of social and historical change. The focus on the 'individual' also illustrates how differences in one's social position — status, gender, class, and other parameters — shape one's historical experience/ understanding. Thus,

[50]Aditya Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique', *Economic & Political Weekly* 35, no. 48 (2000): 4256–68.
[51]Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, Theory and History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 38.
[52]Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma, 'The Biographical Turn: Biography as Critical Method in the Humanities and in Society', in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, ed. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 5.
[53]Daniel R Meister, 'The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography', *History Compass* e12436 (2017): 4–5.

> …biography can be seen as the archetypal 'contingent narrative' and the one best able to show the great importance of particular locations and circumstances and the multiple layers of historical change and experience.[54]

There are broadly two opinions regarding the study of autobiography in India. Scholars like Vijaya Ramaswamy argue that 'self-reflexive writing in the autobiographical mode' has been part of the literary tradition in India.[55] An example Ramaswamy mentions to make her case is the lyrical, mystical-spiritual self-narrative titled *Atmanivedan* by a fourteenth-century Maharashtrian Brahmin saint, Bahina Bai. Married at a very young age, Bai's life was an attempt to balance her duty as a good wife with her 'uncontrollable, passionate love for god'. Bai acknowledged Tukaram, the Sudra saint, as her guru.[56] For Ramaswamy, Bahina Bai's autobiography provides a sense of the dynamics of gender and caste of the time. For another set of scholars, however, any writing that is intensely personal and experiential may not always translate into autobiography.[57] A R Venkatachalapathy, for instance, argues that only those narratives which foreground a self that is 'recollected, interpreted and reflected upon from the calm vantage points of the present' amounts to autobiography.[58] Venkatachalapathy identifies the practice of autobiographical writing as closely tied to notions of individuality and the expression of self.[59] Such narratives emerge in the backdrop of colonialism, and hence, autobiography is, therefore, a western genre. This thesis does not dwell on the nature of autobiography as a western or 'indigenous' tradition of writing. Instead, it focuses on that feature of Indian autobiographies written in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as identified by Udaya Kumar: 'the obsessive preoccupation with the experience of historical change'. Kumar notes that,

> Using the life of the author at times as a mere pretext, they sought to provide their readers with a 'slice of history'. Truth claims made in these narratives were simultaneously historical

[54]Caine, *Biography and History*, 10–11.
[55]Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Introduction', in *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009), 1.
[56]Ramaswamy, 1–2.
[57]Ramaswamy, 2.
[58]A R Venkatachalapathy, 'Making of a Modern Self in Colonial Tamil Nadu', in *Biography as History: Indian Perspectives*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy and Yogesh Sharma, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009), 31.
[59]Venkatachalapathy, 31–32.

> and personal: the veracity of the account of the past was grounded in a testamentary claim made by the narrating voice. Even as they made statements of an intimate nature about the personal life of the author or of the other individuals, they were also intervening in ongoing processes that shaped a collective memory. The autobiographer in these texts is, simultaneously, the author of an individual act of truth-telling and the subject of a shared historical memory.[60]

Against the broader framework of biography as history, I place this thesis within the sub-field of intellectual biography. Intellectuals are portrayed on the basis of their theoretical and ideological paradigms. In India, intellectuals are seen as part of the times they are located in, fixed within given chronological brackets. On the other hand, we can see the interventions of intellectuals themselves, constituting distinct temporal phases. The area of intellectual history has evolved along two broad axes of enquiry. Studying the intellectual traditions in India by tracing the epistemic orders embedded in vernacular texts is one approach – followed by scholars like Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman, Sheldon Pollock, Udaya Kumar, Sudipta Kaviraj, and A R Venkatachalapathy.[61] The other approach, termed the history of intellectuals, is adopted by Shruti Kapila, Aishwary Kumar, Dilip M Menon and Ajay Skaria, who examine the sources of the ideas that animate the actions of the intellectuals.[62] This thesis presumes that the strategies undertaken by intellectuals in society illuminate the availability of diverse intellectual traditions present in a particular society and also how they shape the history of intellectuals. The thesis, therefore, borrows from these two

[60]Udaya Kumar, 'Autobiography as a Way of Writing History: Personal Narratives From Kerala and the Inhabitation of Modernity', in *History in the Vernacular*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Razuiddin Aquil, 1st ed. (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008), 421.

[61]Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Text and Tradition in South India*, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: The Orient Blackswan, 2016); David Shulman, *Spring, Heat, Rains: A South Indian Diary*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Sheldon Pollock, 'Is There an Indian Intellectual History? Introduction to "Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History"', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 5/6 (2008): 533–42; Kumar, *Writing the First Person*; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Venkatachalapathy, 'Making of a Modern Self in Colonial Tamil Nadu'.

[62]Shruti Kapila, ed., *An Intellectual History for India*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Aishwary Kumar, *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the Risk of Democracy*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2019); Dilip M. Menon, 'Writing History in Colonial Times: Polemic and the Recovery of Self in Late Nineteenth-Century South India', *History and Theory* 54, no. 4 (2015): 64–83; Ajay Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance*, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2016).

modes of enquiry. The study belongs to the genre of the history of intellectuals and their social worlds, straddled through the methods of intellectual biography as history.

Historiographical interventions in the intellectual traditions in India are an advancing area of enquiry. In contrast, the field of studies on the history of intellectuals and their social worlds from a global south perspective involves a broader approach that focuses on the role of intellectuals and various intellectual traditions in expanding the notion of 'equality' in India.[63] Intellectual deliberations in the early-twentieth century India essentially captured the new ideas, practices, and categories of thought in contention with existing socio-political norms. In doing so, exploring the importance of available vernacular conceptual categories alongside Western ideas of equality in South Asian contexts is essential. The question of the 'social' in developing ideas and practices of equality in a caste-based society like India needs to be understood.[64] In this regard, G Arunima alerts us that categories such as community, language, region and ethnicity, considered stable by the twentieth century, are not necessarily helpful in analysing pre-colonial pasts of social groups or regions.[65] If socio-cultural parameters define the limits of the subjective world of intellectuals, it is essential to map the history of intellectuals and intellectual history that, in turn, opens up broader possibilities for doing cultural history. For one, such studies enable one to critically interrogate some of the fundamental philosophical questions of modernity.[66]

Cultural reshaping and the fashioning of the self in the public sphere during the colonial period initiated one of the many forms of colonial modernity in India.

[63]For instance, Aishwary Kumar theorises the aspect of 'force' as an action in relation to intellectuals like Ambedkar and Gandhi. See Kumar, *Radical Equality*.

[64]Aditya Nigam's suggestion on the need to theorise using the varied thinking traditions from within and across cultures becomes relevant here. See Aditya Nigam, 'Decolonisation of Theory: A New Conjuncture', in *Decolonizing Theory: Thinking Across Traditions*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2020), 322.

[65]G Arunima, 'Who Is a Malayali Anyway? Language, Community and Identity in Precolonial Kerala', in *Assertive Religious Identities: India and Europe*, ed. Satish Saberwal and Mushirul Hasan, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 33–57.

[66]For instance, Sudipta Kaviraj's study of intellectuals who went beyond the new literary trends of the early-twentieth century exemplifies such a scholarship. Kaviraj talks about the need to locate the social and cultural inheritances of intellectuals to understand forces that have shaped their subjectivities in the specific context of South Asia. See Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Advantages of Being a Barbarian', in *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, 1st ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

Modernity marks a historical period and is also described as a sociological condition.[67] Attempts to historicise modernity in India have been about understanding the centrality of specific historical experiences and the new realities that emerge from these historical processes. The cultural frameworks of modernity were shaped by new ideas in literature and new forms of creative expressions such as the autobiography, the novel, plays, and essays leading to changes in aesthetic, textual and experiential expressions.[68] These then impart a certain quality to the experience of modernity. In India, the intellectuals as public interventionists unfolded themselves as a by-product of the Eurocentric notions of modernity. The peculiarity of intellectuals in India is that the intellectuals belonging to 'the vernacular' often had to engage with the canons of Western or colonial modernity to get themselves represented. The given category of nation constrains one from looking at the silences in history. In this regard, it becomes pertinent to foreground the interventions made by the intellectuals in 'regional', 'vernacular' contexts, both within and outside the framework of the nation.

The entry point for this thesis is E M S's autobiographical narratives. E M S's autobiographical writings, *Aathmakatha* or *How I Became a Communist* and *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal* (or *Reminiscences of an Indian Communist*) are texts that reveal E M S's inner worlds. In his autobiographical writings, EMS looked back on his life through the vantage point of a fully developed intellectual; EMS telescoped the multiple experiences of time zones that he had occupied as a young man. The phases of his political evolution are refracted; the self-narrative declares the 'arrival' of the communist in the title of his autobiography. The narrative, drawn from the self-probings, marks how EMS proceeded towards achieving or configuring a modern self through the many intellectual registers he develops over time.

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[67]Peter Osborne discusses about the relation between the 'meanings of "modernity" as a category of historical periodisation and its meaning as a distinctive form or quality of social experience-in the dialectics of a temporalisation of history'. Osborne presents three distinct but connected approaches to the problem: 'the ideas of modernity as a category of historical periodization, a quality of social experience, and an (incomplete) project'. See Peter Osborne, 'Modernity Is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological Category', *New Left Review* 1/192 (April 1992): 65–84.

[68]For instance, Francesca Orsini locates the ways in which ideas about language and literature reflected attitudes to the 'public' among Hindi writers and activists in pre-independent India: Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

EMS was deeply moved by the biographies he read voraciously as a young Namboothiri, eventually influencing his entry into political activism; his first political writing was a biography of Nehru. It is interesting to ask how EMS positions himself when he writes his autobiography. One of the narrative styles employed by EMS was that he always depicted his life along with societal transformations, situating the self within these developments. Though he might not have always been a direct part of it, EMS places himself along with these changes in society as part of the political history of Kerala and beyond. In doing so, the society and the self run on parallel grooves sometimes and converge at other times. EMS's narratives of his early life, including childhood experiences and the transitions marking the beginning of his involvement with the broader community and societal questions, are more experiential. It is a narration and representation of a period, changing cultures and histories within and outside the community. Rather than a stand-alone element in the narrative, the self is thus embedded in society, social change and history. As the narrative moves on (when he assumes more responsibilities in the communist party), EMS's subjective positioning in the narrative changes, from placing the self in history to writing history through the self. Written subtly, the narratives shift to situate roles that he has played in different junctures in Kerala's history, including his role in the formation of the linguistic state and the growth of the communist party after the split. The narrative is constructed more like a 'truth' or 'demonstration' book than an 'experience book'. Thus, in examining EMS's representation of the subjectivation and desubjectivation process, I argue that he analyses his own experiences and transforms the experiential account into a 'truth book'.

Textual sources constitute the root and branch of this thesis. These texts fall into two broad categories. EMS's autobiographical writings, including experiential and demonstrative accounts, form the first set of texts. The second set of texts provides the contextual histories. These include late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Malayalam magazines such as *Vidyavinodini*, *Rasikaranjini*, *Mangalodayam*, *Yogakshemam* and *Unni Namboothiri,* which were analysed to map the emerging elite print public sphere, specifically the Namboothiri public sphere. This constituted EMS's inherited public and the space in which he would actively engage and transform. The

world of the peasants and their mobilisations in the 1930s and 1940s are reconstructed by using *Prabhatham*, the socialist newspaper. Additionally, I have used autobiographies, memoirs, biographies, and secondary literature to map the history of the left in Kerala.

Chapterisation

To write 'the history of the present' is to consider the history of a problem in terms of how it is seen in the present. Analysing a contemporary practice means viewing it from the standpoint of the historical basis out of which it emerges, and it implies grounding our understanding of its current structure on the basis of the series of its previous transformations.[69] The political present deifies EMS Namboodiripad along the axis of a historical past. This construction of this past revolves around the contributions of EMS as a left intellectual, parliamentarian and also as an organiser. Often, he is seen as a communist par exemplar for his disciplined and dedicated work for the communist parties and especially for 'eschewing' his Brahmin locations.[70] The pivotal importance of looking at the interventions made by EMS Namboodiripad thus begins from the specific historical claims around the intellectual[71]and its active contestations in the contemporary political present. While considering the iconic image of EMS Namboodiripad as a public intellectual in the left politics of Kerala society, it is crucial to analyse the political and social constituents of modern subjectivities in the public sphere. In addressing this question, this thesis analyses the formation of subjectivities that were formed along with the political ideologies in Kerala.

[69]Though this work does not engage with the themes on genealogy, it identifies with the method of 'problematization': 'Problematization is not the representation of a preexisting object, or the creation through the discourse of an object that does not exist. It is the totality of discursive and non discursive practices that brings something into the play of truth and falsehood and sets it up as an object for the mind. See Robert Castel, '"Problematization" as a Mode of Reading History', in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, ed. Jan Ellen Goldstein, 1st ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 237–52.

[70]Oommen says that 'There were stories of sacrifices made by EMS Namboodiripad, the veteran national leader of CPI, and his readiness to eat in the "Pulaya kudils" or huts despite the fact that he was a Brahmin.' George Oommen, 'The Struggle of Anglican Pulaya Christians for Social Improvements in Travancore, 1854 - 1966' (PhD Thesis, Sydney, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1993), 385.

[71]See, for instance, this recollection in which an aged communist activist fondly recalls and strongly asserts the need to remember the role of EMS and his interventions in the land reforms of Kerala: truecopythink, *ജോൺ അബ്രഹാമിന്റെകൂടുകാരൻ കുട്ടനാടിന്റെചരിത്രംപറയുന്നു | Mangalassery Padmanabhan*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rQ6dynAw6Q.

One way to locate an intellectual's thought-scapes is to explain the shifts in their ideologies through changing temporal and spatial conditions. The particular social contexts and dynamics they are enmeshed in providing the agencies for the shifting ideas in mutating socio-political contexts.[72] At the same time, the study looks at the ideas of this intellectual not merely as ideas of changing economic and social conditions. The study intends to locate his ideas in the contexts of their springing into being. The thesis underlines the interplay between the context that determines the actions of this intellectual and how EMS was also redefining the context. However, this is traced through EMS's intellectual interventions in the public sphere, where he reshapes and provides a new context for his ideas and the fashioning of a rational subject (individual) within the public domain. This argument will be elaborated by scrutinising the ideology and the action-oriented practices of ideology by EMS Namboodiripad within the Namboothiri Brahmin community and with respect to his political engagements with the peasants in Kerala, especially Malabar.

EMS's entry as an intellectual coincided with a time when Kerala society was addressing questions of caste, gender, religion, and community reforms.[73] Contextualising EMS's early interventions is an attempt to identify the factors that free/ liberate a person from a specific understanding of belongingness to a community. The colonial period allowed the possibility for individuals to partially challenge the ties that bound them to their respective communities, and the new domain of the public sphere played a vital role in this process. Therefore, there were two distinct agents that occupied the publics at this juncture. The first was the 'individual' in the process of autonomy and individuation, and the second was that of the community that both

[72]In trying to think about intellectual activity, it is important to see if the defining limits are set by sociology or history. Peter Burke advances possible intersections between sociology and history. See, Peter Burke, *Sociology and History*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Having seen the possibilities of these intersections, it is imperative to see the premises at which one is locating the social contexts of the intellectuals of the global south. See, Raewyn Connell, 'Using Southern Theory: Decolonizing Social Thought in Theory, Research and Application', *Planning Theory* 13, no. 2 (2014): 210–23.

[73]For studies covering this contentious period, see: Udaya Kumar, 'Self, Body and Inner Sense: Some Reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan', *Studies in History* 13, no. 2 (1 August 1997): 247–70; Sanal P Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial India*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals*; G Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar c. 1850-1940*, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2003).

identified within itself in a reflexively critical manner. A new format of political consciousness and a modern understanding of intellectual awakening that contested colonial power relations and articulations of the self is thus seen in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Kerala.

The intellectual departures of EMS were constituted by the Namboothiri reform movement, which facilitated his foray into the public, thus the larger ideological vantage points of Gandhism, Socialism and Marxism, which he successively adopted as life-world directives. The changing frameworks account for several positions in EMS's intellectual engagements. The first chapter considers political engagements as essential for locating the modern and placing oneself as modern. The chapter identified the operation of the political and the quests for equality that resulted in the shifting frameworks as the working of the modern. Here, I apply the Foucauldian concept of subjectivation to understand EMS's intellectual shifts. This will be done by looking at EMS's self-probing as available in his autobiographical narratives.[74]

The processes of encountering new ideologies could not be separated from the domain that aided and mediated these transitions – the public sphere. Moreover, one of the questions taken up will be the intricate processes in which EMS Namboodiripad, in his early intellectual career, identified the emerging public sphere. In doing so, the second chapter lays out the inherited public spheres of EMS by locating the Namboothiri, Brahmin engagements in this emerging upper-caste print public domain. Thus, EMS's mediations as part of the Namboothiri community reform movement, marking the beginning of EMS's intellectual career, is contextualised against the public cultures of the early-twentieth century. It shows how a distinct politics of time characterised the emerging upper-caste print public.

For Namboothiris, the print public enabled the synchronisation/homogenisation of the geographically and temporally scattered community and the construction of new temporalities through the project of writing history. However, this was not a smooth

[74]EMS's autobiographical narratives spread across his *Aathmakatha*, *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal* and a series of articles containing recollections. *Aathmakatha* and *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal* have been translated into various languages; its English translations are *How I Became a Communist* and *Reminiscences of an Indian Communist* respectively. Parts of the thesis draws primarily from these two texts and their respective translations.

process and resulted in a clash of temporalities revolving around ‘reform’ and ‘tradition’. The interventions made by EMS Namboodiripad in early-twentieth century Keralam would entail the development of a political and social self that challenged existing social hierarchies through the newly opened domain of the public. EMS attempted to liberate the community from the shackles of tradition and prod the community towards inhabiting the modern time zones.

The third chapter examines the ensuing intellectual reconstitutions, significantly how EMS modified his inherited public spheres. These attempts represented a process of desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self and the assumption of a ‘human’, casteless self that EMS posited in the early stages of his reformist self and a ‘proletarian’ self identified in his communist phase. At the same time, the desubjectivation process EMS proposed was rife with contradictions that ultimately limited the ‘revolutionary’ potential. The several intellectual manoeuvres EMS undertook in the community and the distinct politics of time he articulated also represented a modern, ‘protean Brahmin self’. Rather than a radical shift of temporalities, this modern Brahmin self created a new time-space for caste in secularised forms. However, as social-political emphases shift to ‘equality and secularism, the ‘protean Brahmin self’ reflexively discards certain rationalities regulating caste-hierarchies while surreptitiously retaining some ‘habits’ that can usefully augment the competitive merit-driven requirements of the new public sphere. Caste privileges, therefore, turn to intellectual capital that can be calibrated through a secular register.

As I had looked at the emergence of the upper-caste Namboothiri public in the second chapter, I look at the emergence of the left public in chapter four as a diametrically opposite intellectual trend that mapped a very different foundation of a political self, seeking an individualised public sphere that reflected his ethical and ideological concerns and ideas. The fourth chapter attempts to understand EMS’s engagements in the left public sphere by considering his writings on peasants/ agricultural labourers and the agrarian question in Malabar. Although EMS might seem to be dismantling the very social-economic structure he was part of, EMS’s deliberations on the peasant-agrarian question were essentially governed by the same politics of the time that had informed his Namboothiri reform interventions. In other words, the new

analytical category of class that EMS employs makes way for the time of secularised, modernised caste. The category of class underwriting EMS's definition of the peasant-agrarian labourer abstracted the economic from the larger matrix of Brahmin power and subsumed the socio-cultural aspects of oppression under it.

Chapter I.

INCOMPLETE BEGINNINGS: LOCATING THE MODERN THROUGH SHIFTING IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

> In the course of the events narrated here, my life reached a turning point. Passing a childhood of adherence to conservative norms under tradition, adolescence marked by rebellion against tradition by being part of the social reform movement, and the tryst with socialism and communism, thanks to the influence of national leaders like Gandhi and Nehru… I also anticipate that tens of thousands who in any manner never came to associate with the 'world of benevolent and malevolent gods' will be able to relate to the story of how someone who spent his childhood learning Sanskrit and the Rigvedam became a Communist.[1]

The closing remarks cited above from EMS Namboodiripad's *Aathmakatha* signify the already accomplished departure from the given identity of a Brahmin and claim the subjectivity of a communist. The thought-scapes that shape EMS's critical interventions, whether inherited or modified, played the agential roles in rendering these shifts and retentions; and would provide the moral and ethical source to form the scaffolding holding up EMS's intellectual interventions. This chapter attempts to understand how the modern worked in EMS Namboodiripad through the various ideological frameworks he replaced, retained, and blended in his intellectual journey towards becoming a communist. The working of the modern in EMS can be tracked through two avenues – the realms of the political and that of the public. The idea of the political, following Prathama Bannerjee, can be understood in terms of the elements that constitute it, viz., subject, act, idea, and people.[2] In the case of EMS, the political is explicated through the formation of the political subject. EMS used the optic of equality to chalk out a modern redefinition of the political subject. The political provided EMS with the resources to reflect on power structures in society, which restricted human beings.

At the time of intellectual awakening, EMS had identified power within the gendered and ritualistic Namboothiri spaces and the larger Brahminic community. As a

[1]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Vazhithirivu', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 303.
[2]See Banerjee, *Elementary Aspects of the Political*, 13–15.

Gandhian, EMS recognised the operation of power in colonialism, and as a Marxist, in the oppressive socio-economic relations in society. These constituted the shifting ideological configurations marking EMS. In terms of the subject formation of EMS as a political persona, this chapter examines his sequential-cum-interrelated self-disciplining or self-conditioning as Brahmin/ Gandhian/ Communist that turned consistently upon the principle of equality. There is, therefore, a multiplicity of ideological frameworks claimed by EMS's autobiographical narratives. The chapter uses the idea of frameworks from Charles Taylor's definition:

> To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating inter alia what I have been calling here 'frameworks'.[3]

In the early-twentieth century public sphere, multiple ideas and imaginations of equality were articulated. Shifting from a tradition of hierarchical *varnashrama dharma* imbibed through his Brahminical upbringing to the absorption of elements of Enlightenment rationality and Eurocentric universalism through modern education and the public sphere, EMS gains an understanding of the idea of equality to interrogate the Namboothiri social structure. The realm of the public, which had both facilitated and acted as the medium of EMS's intellectual and ideological interventions, had been fundamentally modern (as will be discussed in chapter II). Although the idea of equality circulates in different locations of the contemporary public, including upper caste spaces or those inhabited by subaltern communities, it did not necessarily translate into an all-inclusive framework.[4] In this context, I look at EMS's interventions in the public and locate the modern.

EMS Nambodiripad's intellectual sojourn begins with the Namboothiri reform movement in Kerala in the early-1920s. At this point, EMS engaged with questions on the normative social orders of the community and the practices which regulated all

[3]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 26.
[4]For a critique of the social reform movement in early-twentieth century Kerala, see Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals*.

aspects of the life of Namboothiri men and women. In this early phase of his public career, the sources that constituted EMS's intellectual frameworks and that of the self had their roots in the Dharmasastras and Vedas. These were reshaped by modern rationalism and Gandhian principles. For almost a decade, he was a staunch Gandhian, the influences of which EMS retained even decades into his tryst with socialism and communism. The encounters with new frameworks always took EMS back to the given Brahmin identity and enabled him to examine it critically. The constant interventions made by EMS Namboodiripad in the existing public spheres drew on the carefully developed sources of the self within him.

This chapter traces the intellectual quests, starting from his Brahmin location to Gandhism, Socialism and finally, Marxism. At the same time, the compartmentalised identities of being a Brahmin, a Gandhian, a Socialist and a Marxist do not exhaust EMS Namboodiripad's engagements in different political organisations. These shifts can be seen as moments in the transitory phases of an intellectual and the evolution of a praxis. The active application of ideological convictions within his socio-political world got animated through his interventions in the public sphere. The moral sources of the self became reflected in EMS's interventions in the public domain. The analysis will also provide an account of EMS Namboodiripad's intellectual trajectory, marked paradoxically by both epistemic autonomy and dependence. To see the conditions within which the conflicted modern identity was shaped, this chapter sets out the subjectivation and desubjectivation processes of EMS as expressed in his autobiographical narratives. All these phases impacted the shifts in EMS's discursive strategies, which accompanied the swing in his political orientations at particular temporal junctures: a Namboothiri, a nationalist and a communist.

The following sections will delve into these aspects of EMS's autobiographical narratives. Section I examines EMS's self-probing about his conditioning/ formation as a Namboothiri Brahmin and the beginning of desubjectivation. Section II deals with the new subjectivation processes EMS underwent as a reformist Namboothiri; section III looks at the new frames of thought EMS gained as a nationalist, primarily through Gandhism, and the resultant subjectivities. Section IV looks at the formation of EMS as

a communist, examining the affective and subjective aspects of his conditioning as a left intellectual, followed by a conclusion.

Caste Subjectivations and its Perturbations

The kaleidoscopic and simultaneously critical view of the early life which EMS Namboodiripad provides in his autobiography gives insights into the formation of a distinct Brahmin subjectivity in him. EMS vividly portrays how certain beliefs, customs and practices enacted within the ritualistically and hierarchically organised space of the Namboothiri *illam* (household) shaped his view of the world and his place within it as a child. The ritual functions of the households were regulated by the prescriptions and proscriptions laid down by the Sastric texts.[5] In the case of Namboothiri Brahmins of Kerala, several texts, including *Sankarasmriti*, had laid down elaborate codes for everyday life.[6] EMS's narrative begins with his childhood impressions of the 'fictitious world of benevolent and malevolent gods', which dictated human actions.[7] The formative experiences of EMS's early life are thus connected to 'the world of gods' (rather than humans), the world of Brahminical ideas and beliefs shaping the self.

EMS writes how he was subjected to this world of supernatural beings through the oral narratives passed down across generations and everyday ritual enactments. The worship of the gods was an essential part of everyday life within the house. There were permanent, consecrated spaces inside the quadrangular *illam*, exclusive prayer rooms, where the gods, bedecked in garlands and flowers, were worshipped and offerings were made from time to time during the day. Religious rites inside the sanctum sanctorum were conducted by Namboothiri men. Women, prohibited from performing religious rites, made offerings themselves at separate shrines allocated for them.[8] Women sang devotional hymns praising gods and goddesses and were expected to be versed in the Ramayana, Mahabharatham, Bhagavatham and Bhagavat Gita. As a child,

[5]T. K. Anandi, 'Home as Sacred Space: The Household Rituals and Namputiri Women of Kerala', in *Culture and Modernity: Historical Explorations*, ed. K.N. Ganesh, 1st ed. (Calicut: Publication Division, University of Calicut, 2004), 142–49.
[6]T. C. Parameshwaran Moosathu, *Sankarasmrithi (Laghu Dharma Prakasika)* (Thrissur: Bharatha Vilasam Press, 1906)
[7]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Daivangaludeyum Pishachukaludeyum Lokam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 13.
[8]Namboodiripad, 10.

EMS was introduced to these texts by the female members of the *illam*, especially his mother, who wished to transmit all her knowledge to her son.[9] EMS's mother had sought to provide him with the best education available for a Namboothiri boy then and train EMS according to her expectations of a 'good person'.[10] EMS credits the 'knowledgeable women' in the household for their role in shaping his 'cultural growth' by nurturing his interest in these texts and the habit of reading.[11]

Another crucial influence in EMS's formation as a Namboothiri was his *guru*, who supervised the customary Sanskritic and Rigvedic education he received.[12] Unlike his brothers, who were sent for modern education comprising reading, writing and arithmetic, EMS was initiated into Sanskrit education under a Namboothiri tutor when he was five. Attaining the ability to read in Malayalam, the Grantha and the Devanagari scripts within a few years of this phase, EMS read voraciously — Malayalam literary texts at first and later, newspapers and periodicals.[13] The investiture ceremony, signified by the wearing of the *poonoolu* (the sacred thread), was conducted after two to three years of Sanskrit learning. Following the ceremony, EMS received the customary instruction in the Rigvedam under the same tutor for about three years, intending to become an *othan* (hymnologist). The learners of the Rigvedam were only expected to commit the Vedic verses to memory without often knowing their meanings or interpretations. In this period, EMS lived a rigid routine of *brahmacharya*, comprising ritual ablutions and worship, Sanskrit and Vedic learning, and the associated mnemonic exercises.[14]

The *brahmacharya* period, with its rigid rules and rigorous modes of learning, was a significant aspect in shaping a Namboothiri. EMS recalls that the environment was conducive to developing within him the yearning to become a well-known literary and Sastric scholar and hymnologist in the future, a wish shared by his mother and instructor too.[15] EMS's ambitions at this early stage of life were therefore limited to creating a

[9]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Ezhuthinu Vechasesham', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 15; EMS Namboodiripad, 'Bhoolokathile Devaastreekal', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 31.
[10]Namboodiripad, 'Ezhuthinu Vechasesham', 14–15.
[11]Namboodiripad, 'Bhoolokathile Devaastreekal', 31.
[12]Namboodiripad, 'Ezhuthinu Vechasesham', 16.
[13]Namboodiripad, 17.
[14]Namboodiripad, 19.
[15]Namboodiripad, 19.

space for himself within the Namboothiri social life. Namboothiris, who mastered the Rigvedam, attended regular hymnological competitions, like the prestigious Kadavalloor Anyonyam and earned name and fame. The Anyonyam competition happened between two factions, the Thrissur Yogam (to which EMS's *illam* belonged) and the Thirunavaya Yogam, at a temple in Kadavalloor, Thrissur.[16] Although EMS would 'fail miserably' to qualify for the Kadavalloor Anyonyam and the desire to become a hymnologist would wane by the time he turned fourteen years, he would avidly follow the competitions at the event with a sense of belongingness to the Thrissur Yogam.[17] I would like to point to a subterranean double action that the mature EMS is gesturing towards: while the context of the Rig Vedam is discarded/dismantled as unsuitable for a modern scaffolding of self-hood, the self-discipline to acquire new skill-sets is retained as an essential feature of a modern self. This move would feed into the reconfiguration of 'the protean Brahmin self' that I lay out later (chapter III).

Gradually, EMS also came to understand the larger social world that his life was embedded within the Namboothiri community and beyond.[18] EMS came to understand the rigidity of sub-caste differences, similar to the caste differences he might have witnessed at his *illam* between Namboothiri family members and Nair retainers.[19] Restrictions regarding touch were strictly followed not only with castes deemed untouchable and the non-Brahmin *savarna* castes like Nairs but also with *paradesa* (non-Malayali) Brahmins and lower tiers within the Namboothiris.[20] As a result, EMS was left with a set of beliefs that would exert an influence on him even years into his early adulthood:

> The rules governing the relations between castes and sub-castes are divinely ordained, the transgression of which would earn the wrath of the gods. God occasioned the birth of boys like me in the highest caste, and that too within the topmost sub-caste layer, by virtue of

[16]I. V. Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 2001), 43.
[17]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Othanmarude Pareeksha', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 55.
[18]Namboodiripad, 'Ezhuthinu Vechasesham', 19.
[19]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Thampuran Vazhcha', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 20.
[20]Namboodiripad, 22.

> the good deeds done in previous births (*mujjanmapunyam*). Committing any sin by infringing caste rules was tantamount to depriving oneself of the *mujjanmapunyam*.[21]

According to EMS, such beliefs prevented Namboothiri children like him from realising the 'absurdity' of caste discrimination.[22] Especially significant was EMS's realisation of his social status as an *adyan* Namboothiris vis-à-vis the lesser order *aasyan* Namboothiris. Additionally, family members and others in the household carefully cultivated within EMSa sense of pride in the *illam's* prime position within the community.[23]

Although it owned large tracts of land, EMS's *illam* did not engage in agriculture, renting out land to tenants who would pay the rent in the form of agricultural products.[24] As the only Namboothiri household in the place, EMS also became aware of his family's primacy within the social structure of *jenmithvam* (landlordism) by witnessing the customary practices during the annual harvest festivals of Onam and Vishu, where tenants pledged allegiance to their landlord. This involved gifts such as agricultural products, implements and other wares, offered in obeisance to the *jenmi* by various castes and occupational groups who depended on the landlord.[25] EMS's *illam* was also associated with the Valluvanad royal house, holding special titles and ceremonial positions in royal rituals.[26] EMS states that the pride-filled claims surrounding the titles and positions frequently invoked in his childhood left a mark on him.[27] Mythical tales like the legend of Parasurama cultivated in EMS, as with other Namboothiri children, a belief in the certainty and permanence of Brahmin power.[28] EMS critically reflects that this form of power, called *thamburan vaazcha* ('the reign of the lord'), that blended casteism, landlordism and feudalism and was perpetuated

[21]Namboodiripad, 22.
[22]Namboodiripad, 22.
[23]Namboodiripad, 23.
[24]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Bolshevism', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 8.
[25]Namboodiripad, 'Thampuran Vazhcha', 24.
[26]Namboodiripad, 25–26.
[27]Namboodiripad, 26.
[28] The legend describes Parasurama's recovery of the landmass of Kerala from the sea and the settlement of Brahmins within it. Namboodiripad, 'Bhoolokathile Devaastreekal', 27.

through existing modes of instruction and other practices central to Namboothiri upbringing.[29]

Late into his childhood, various factors resulted in the rupture of EMS's faith in the certitude of *thamburaan vaazcha*. A chief source of this transition was the new affective experiences that significantly impacted his Namboothiri self. New spatial understandings, notions of time and bodily practices that were introduced to him constituted a modern subjective experience different from the Namboothiri way of being. EMS traces these shifts in his recollections, starting with his encounter with a more 'urban', 'refined' atmosphere in Irinjalakkuda and Thrissur (Cochin) occasioned by their temporary migration from Malabar during the Khilafat agitation of 1921.[30] The sights and experiences in Irinjalakkuda — the greater number of automobiles plying through roads, of schools and educated professionals, of people embodying urbane upkeep— were qualitatively different from the atmosphere of Vedic recital and Sanskrit learning in the more rural and interior Elamkulam.[31] These changes were not sudden, though, considering that EMS's close relations and acquaintances had already adopted some of these practices; however, as the learner of the Rigvedam, EMS's *brahmachari* life was more regimented than his brothers'.[32] The six-month stay in Cochin eased some of these restrictions, and EMS began to take a keen interest in exploring new places and experiences like football.[33] The scenes and encounters in the town of Thrissur EMS visited during this time were even more thrilling:

> The clothes people wore appeared to be strange. The sight of persons dressed in suits and neckties with cigarettes and cigars on their lips enthralled me. Above all, the freedom to enter any hotel and choose a sweet dish on my own, of which there was quite a large variety, was exhilarating too. During and after our days in Thrissur, traces of the urban influence lingered in the family. It was around this period that my family started a bus service. It was called — Elamkulam Mana Motor Service — EMMS, for short…These journeys, naturally, presented many occasions to meet and establish contact with people of several

[29]Namboodiripad, 27.
[30]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Pattanaparishkaram', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 44.
[31]Namboodiripad, 44–45.
[32]Namboodiripad, 45–46.
[33]Namboodiripad, 45.

communities.…they led lives uninhibited by any traditional norms, sometimes even going against them… almost identical to the vision of the Namboothiri social reform movement.'[34]

The quotation cited here clearly denotes a sense of time experienced by the young Namboothiri. EMS looks back at his family (situated within the community) against the changing world and the realities associated with multiple social times and social structures. One can perceive three social times in the excerpt: the first states a temporal bracket when the autobiography is narrated, his mature location of a stable political self. Here, EMS, as a social actor, seeks to organise and control the narrative, and he sharply animadverts to the moment when he had visually registered the seduction of the modern. His eyes had noted the clothes and cigars; his taste buds had registered sweets in hotels, a very modern space with no clearly etched caste restrictions and reserved for entertainment and food, removing traditional restrictions on sharp demarcations of bodily pollution transmitted through impure spaces uncorrected through rituals. A new world of modern culture had thereby opened up for him. Second, a young Namboothiri's social time, which was primarily constituted by the community's encounters with modernity and the emergence of a new social time in which people began to lead a new life uninhibited by a traditional outlook, typically exemplified by the entrepreneurial spirit that spotted an economic opportunity in running a bus-service (a new economic order). And finally, a time visualised by Namboothiri social reformers who critically analysed their inherited times and pasts (envisioning a new social world). The amalgamation of diverse temporal orientations within an objective chronological narrative time ordered by the stable and committed communist shows us how EMS Namboodiripad straddled the transitions in the public sphere in Keralam.[35]

[34]Namboodiripad, 48–49.

[35]John R. Hall, 'The Time of History and the History of Times', *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (1980): 113–31. For Hall, the 'comparative phenomenology of time' provides the basis for linking the temporal character of social action with the unfolding process of history. This historiographical approach is premised on the argument that because of the variations in subjective and social temporal orientations among individuals and groups over chronological time, the knowledge of historically given orientations can enrich our understandings of social order and social change. According to Hall, 'The character and meaningful content of social life in many ways give shape to times of people's lives. Indeed many events happen "outside" of objective time, that is, in realms of activity which are disconnected from any significant location on an objective temporal scale. Measured objective time exists simply as a social convention, clearly more or less important in different ways for various participants and arenas of social

EMS records that these experiences transformed his life goals and kindled a desire to attend schools and embrace the novel and refined manners (*naveena parishkaram*) that accompanied modern education.[36] Moreover, contacts with English-educated individuals in Cochin who were in the habit of reading newspapers and periodicals intensified EMS's interest in political affairs.[37] On return to his *illam* a few months later, EMS began to learn English and arithmetic from a home tutor for more than a year to prepare himself to join the school.[38] So strong was his wish to learn English that EMS had already learned the alphabet on his own, using his brothers' textbooks.[39] In June 1925, EMS was admitted to the Perinthalmanna High School, signifying not only a departure from the existing routine of Vedic learning but a milestone in life itself.[40] School proved to be an unusual experience in EMS's life on many fronts — 'peers from Tamil Brahmin, Thiyya and Nair backgrounds than the company of exclusively 'upper-caste', landowning family and friends' he had hitherto known.[41] The modes of instruction and assessments were different from that of traditional Namboothiri education. Instead of the rote learning system from his Vedic instruction days, EMS studied in school by internalising the meaning of words, grammatical rules, and syntax.[42] The division of class hours into respective 'periods' was another new experience.[43] The modern sense of time gained in school allowed EMS to organise his life in a disciplined and routinised manner. Thus, EMS would allocate time for study, daily and weekly revision of lessons, punctually attending classes, reading books from the library, and making notes.[44] The habit persisted in his college life and enabled EMS to be a 'good student' while participating in political and community reform activities.[45]

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life, as well as for historians'.

[36]Namboodiripad, 'Pattanaparishkaram', 46.

[37]Namboodiripad, 45.

[38]EMS Namboodiripad, 'School Vidyabhyasam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 70–71.

[39]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Randu Teerthayathrakal', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 60.

[40]Namboodiripad, 'School Vidyabhyasam', 71.

[41]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 35.

[42]Namboodiripad, 'School Vidyabhyasam', 72.

[43]Namboodiripad, 71–72.

[44]Namboodiripad, 75.

[45]EMS Namboodiripad, 'College Vidyabhyasam', in *EMS Aatmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 97.

While EMS participated in drills and even played badminton at school, he was more inclined to pursuits of the intellectual kind — elocution, essay writing and debate. As school opened a new avenue of socialisation and social consciousness, it also provided teachers who nurtured his interest in the national movement and reading habits.[46] By this time, the interest in a 'public career', by being associated with both Namboothiri social reform and nationalist activity, had sprouted within him. Already, EMS had served as the secretary of the Valluvanad sub-committee of Yogakshema Sabha, the Namboothiri reform organisation, for a year before joining the school.[47] With this intention in mind, EMS would even choose history over mathematics at a decisive juncture in school life. In fact, EMS's first article published in a radical Namboothiri publication in 1927 was based on lessons from his history textbooks and argued about the salience of the French Revolution for community reform.[48] However, in school, EMS would write essays about various topics. EMS shifted to Palakkad in his final year in school (1928-29), and the new experience of living with classmates and exposure to the nearby college life provided an enriching experience, something he would not have gained had he stayed back in Perinthalmanna.[49]

These experiences, as we see, represented an understanding that was qualitatively different from the familiar Namboothiri ways of life. EMS traces the transitions in his affective bearing by contrasting two pilgrimages he made to temples outside Kerala in the early-1920s. The first one was to Rameswaram, in the company of Namboothiris, who scrupulously followed ritual purity and the other to Pazhani, after a few years of the first pilgrimage, with his modern-minded family member and few friends. EMS observes that they would meticulously observe ritual purity during the first pilgrimage. The strictness was attributed to the scrupulous fellow pilgrims and his make, or 'upbringing' as EMS calls it.[50] The second journey to Pazhani involving non-Brahmin travellers did not involve any Namboothiri observances, and EMS noted that the experience was more 'pleasant' and 'comfortable' than the first.[51] In the span of two to

[46]Namboodiripad, 'School Vidyabhyasam', 73–74.
[47]Namboodiripad, 73.
[48]Namboodiripad, 'Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum', 37.
[49]Namboodiripad, 38.
[50]Namboodiripad, 'Randu Teerthayathrakal', 61.
[51]Namboodiripad, 62.

three years, when EMS took the second pilgrimage, a perceptible change in mentality that was ostensibly uninfluenced by Brahminical strictures had occurred. Although EMS visited many pilgrimage centres in his later life, he regards the Pazhani journey as the last trip he would undertake as a pilgrim/ believer.[52] The influence of the 'world of gods' was waning, and the foundation for a new, modern self, oriented towards a broader range of questions, was laid. EMS credits his school life for changing from a 'Hindu' to a 'progressive mentality' that enabled him to surpass the limitations of 'religious philosophy'.[53] If EMS had been enamoured by the works of Swami Vivekananda and the ideas of Hindu Mahasabha, by the time he left school, the ideas of Periyar, rationalist publications in Malayalam and 'leftist' ideas helped him overcome his 'Hindu' beliefs.[54]

At the same time, the impact of these transitions did not effect an abrupt and complete replacement of EMS's Namboothiri subjectivity with an ostensibly different, radical subjectivity. For example, in the early-1920s, as the tenancy movement was on the rise in Malabar, EMS's immediate family and himself had understood the demand for tenancy legislation as foreshadowing 'the end of families like ours, as Bolshevism did in Russia'.[55] Scrutinising the pro-landlord sentiments he had then, EMS writes that

> Naturally, I was inclined to the continued enjoyment of the rights and benefits of upper-caste *jenmis*. However, my habit of reading newspapers (especially the news on Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement) had inculcated the thought that all was not well with our society. Gandhi's stances against untouchability and support for Hindu-Muslim unity moved me. I was seduced by the call for *swaraj* and had started wearing *khadi* clothes and learning Hindi. However, the logic of overturning the landlord-tenant relationship escaped me, although I had been avidly following the heated debates on tenancy legislation.[56]

In a decade, however, EMS would transform into a Bolshevik and author a document calling for the end of landlordism.[57]

[52]Namboodiripad, 62.
[53]Namboodiripad, 'Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum', 39.
[54]Namboodiripad, 39.
[55]Namboodiripad, 'Bolshevism', 7.
[56]Namboodiripad, 9.
[57]Namboodiripad, 12.

This section provides the picture of a young Namboothiri, curious about the world, situated at the critical convergence of a series of societal-political transformations—the immediate context of his community marked by radical calls for 'reform' and the larger political flux provided nationalist mobilisation and anti-colonial resistance movements. There was palpable excitement and inspiration to become part of these movements; there was also restraint emerging from caste subjectivities, the reluctance to break the rules of caste and earn the 'wrath of gods'. Simultaneously, EMS developed an urge to actively intervene in the world around him (Namboothiri social world at first, and the broader society later) and bring social and political change. This ambition fitted with the nascent yearning for a 'public' career as a journalist and the desire to bring about social change. EMS Namboodiripad's childhood and early-adulthood experiences within the Namboothiri community were thus two-sided, constituted on the one hand by the internalised beliefs and routinised practices of the community and, on the other, by the broader societal transitions that had begun to impact the community. Even as particular beliefs and ritual practices enacted within the Namboothiri domestic and social spaces were shaping a different Brahmin subjectivity within EMS, these transitions seemed to disassemble this subject and reshape it in complex ways — along both re-subjectivation into a 'modern Brahmin' and desubjectivation into radical reformism and 'leftist nationalism'.

Re-forming the Community and the Self

Community-building efforts among the Namboothiris, facilitated by colonial public culture, had begun to take an institutional form early in the twentieth century with the formation of the Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha in 1908. In its early phases, the Yogakshema Sabha was engaged in efforts to preserve the existing, religiously sanctified way of life. Although a section within the reformers began to articulate the need for 'English education' and modern occupations to protect *jenmi* interests,[58] another section of the Namboothiri Brahmins found the need for more drastic measures of reform for the community. During the late-1920s and 1930s, the Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham, the youth wing of Yogakshema Sabha, took more radical positions regarding

[58]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Puthiya Chalanangal', in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 36–37.

the reorganisation of Namboothiri marriage and family, thereby moving away from the original conservative programme(a detailed account of the activities of the Sabha and the Sangham will be provided in chapters II & III).[59] EMS's association with the Namboothiri reform movement was a significant influence that compelled him to critically examine his Brahmin subjectivity and reconstitute it.

EMS's familiarity with the reform movement can be traced back to the family relations who had been active in the Yogakshema Sabha.[60] However, a more critical factor was the relative ease of access to the world EMS secured in his boyhood with *samavarthanam* (the end of the rigid period of Vedic learning) in May 1920.[61] As the rigid restrictions of *brahmacharya* regarding movement, food, attire, and social interactions ended, EMS began to attend ritual and social events in other Namboothiri houses and temples.[62] In the early-1920s, Namboothiri circles were abuzz with debates and discussions on the question of community reform, some of which reached young boys like EMS.[63] The chief issue of contention then was the question of Namboothiri education, which divided the community ostensibly into 'progressives' and 'conservatives'.[64] The knowledge EMS gained from these interactions was supplemented by his reading habits. EMS would meticulously read *Yogakshemam*, the mouthpiece of the Yogakshema Sabha, and *Unni Namboothiri*, a magazine run by a younger and more radical set of reformer-litterateurs.[65] EMS would also follow the debates in the periodicals, identify the different points of view expressed and arrive at his own opinions.[66] Familiarity with reform literature provided EMS with an understanding of the varied streams of thought within the reform movement consisting

[59]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Politics and Communal Laws', in *How I Became a Communist*, trans. P K Nair (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 85.
[60]Namboodiripad, 'Bhoolokathile Devaastreekal', 27.
[61]*Samavarthanam* marks the completion of the rigorous three-year period of *brahmacharya* that had started after the *upanayanam*.
[62]Namboodiripad, 'Puthiya Chalanangal', 33–34.
[63]Namboodiripad, 34.
[64]Namboodiripad, 34–35.
[65]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 64.
[66]Namboodiripad, 64.

of radical factions, Indian National Congress supporters and Gandhians beyond the progressive-conservative binary.[67]

EMS's visits to Thrissur starting from the Khilafat period in 1921 presented him with opportunities to meet the individuals whose ideas he had either read or heard of and make clarifications in person.[68] The exposure to the ideologically diverse Namboothiris he met at Thrissur imparted in EMS novel perspectives about family, community and nationalism and thus left an impression on his intellectual life.[69] In 1923, when he was fourteen or fifteen years of age, EMS was elected as the secretary of the Valluvanad sub-committee of the Yogakshema Sabha.[70] He held the position only for a year, having had to leave to join the school.[71] As secretary, EMS would write notices, make minutes, organise meetings in different Namboothiri households and temples in Valluvanadand attend the Sabha meetings in Thrissur. EMS acknowledges that the discussions and debates on various aspects of Namboothiri life in these meetings developed his oratorical and writing skills.[72]

By the late-1920s, as reform objectives shifted from modern education to changes in marriage and family structure through modern legislation, organised resistance emerged from conservative Namboothiris.[73] A debate ensued in Namboothiri periodicals of the time, which were divided into 'radical', 'conservative' and 'moderate' positions. EMS's first article appeared in 1927 in a radical magazine called *Pasupatham*, which, according to him, was a 'modest contribution' to the debate between conservative, moderate and radical positions.[74] Consequent to the widening differences between 'conservatives' and 'progressives', Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham began to claim more autonomy from its parent Yogakshema Sabha. By the late-1920s, the Sangham was led by a group of radical Namboothiris of the likes of VT Bhattathiripad

[67]Namboodiripad, 'Pattanaparishkaram', 46–47.
[68]Namboodiripad, 47.
[69]Namboodiripad, 48.
[70]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 67.
[71]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Samoola Parivarthanathinte Onnara Noottandu', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 16.
[72]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 68.
[73]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Mithavatha-Viplava Chinthagathikal Samoohikarangath', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 88.
[74]Namboodiripad, 89.

(hereafter, VT).[75] Thrissur, the headquarters of Yogakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham, was a deliberate choice for EMS's college education from 1929; by then, he had gained the confidence to become part of the community reform movement and contribute to *Unni Namboothiri*, which was transitioning from a monthly to weekly.[76] After that, EMS began to publish more articles on social reform, some of which were published in *Yogakshemam* and became noted in the Namboothiri community as a reformist.[77]

Alongside his work as a journalist, EMS participated in several campaigns conducted by the Yuvajana Sangham that aimed to reform the Namboothiri marriage system. Participation in these reformist interventions was crucial in EMS's desubjectivation. As per the *adhivedana* marriage system of the Namboothiris, structured around primogeniture, only the eldest son could marry Namboothiri women, leaving many unwed women in the community. This custom also led to marriages between young women and the many wedded, and mostly older men. The younger sons of the Namboothiri household would enter into *sambandham* (exogamous relationships) with women of other castes, especially Nair women. The travails of widowhood and polygamy in his own family, including that of his mother, who suffered both, had moved EMS.[78] EMS became part of the 'marriage sub-committees' that organised intra-caste unions against *adhivedana* prohibitions and the picketing of polygamous marriages, forced marriages and marriages between young women and older men.[79] Besides, EMS would contribute to the Yuvajana Sangham initiatives supporting the legal reform of the Namboothiri family and marriage, such as awareness campaigns and the preparation of memorandums during the Kochi government's public consultation process on the legislation.[80] Part of the reformist attempts was therefore

[75]Namboodiripad, 89.
[76]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Visala Lokathekku', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 40.
[77]Namboodiripad, 'Mithavatha-Viplava Chinthagathikal Samoohikarangath', 89.
[78]Namboodiripad, 'Bhoolokathile Devaastreekal', 27–32.
[79]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Vaivahika Viplavam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 112–14.
[80]Namboodiripad, 117.

directed at the promotion of intra-caste marriages (*swajatheeya vivaham*) by supporting the younger Namboothiri males to marry from within the community.

In the late-1920s and early-1930s, EMS got involved in the production and organisation of the performance of VT's revolutionary 1929 play *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* (From Kitchen to the Stage), which highlighted the plight of Namboothiri *antarjanams*. The play, screened across different *illams*, was well-received by the community, especially by women who did not have the chance to access public domains or reformist speeches and campaigns in the predominantly male spaces of Sabha and Sangham meetings.[81] The *antarjanams* — unwed women, child widows, married women, older women, all — would watch the play from behind the corners of the *illams*.[82] EMS recalls how his mother was touched by the play when it was shown at his *illam* and its altering effects on her perspective in favour of *swajatheeya vivaham*.[83] The success of the play resulted prompted other such works like the novel *Aphante Makal* (Uncle's Daughter), written by Moothringode Bhavathrathan Namboothiripad in 1931[84] and *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* (The Hell Behind the Purdah) by Mullamangalath Raman Bhattathirippad (also known as MRB). EMS's role in organising and attending the first widow remarriage of the community between Uma Antharjanam and MRB in September 1934 invited *samudaya bhrasht* (excommunication from the community). The *bhrasht* created discontent in EMS's joint family and hastened the partition of the *illam* in 1935.[85] More importantly, EMS had to abstain from performing the cremation rituals of his mother.[86] The painful experience of withdrawing from the cremation rituals owing to the excommunication strengthened EMS's political convictions and aided the desubjectivation process. EMS remarks that the post-cremation ceremonies he was

[81]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Natakabhinayam Oru Pracharanopadhi', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 108–11.
[82]Namboodiripad, 110.
[83]Namboodiripad, 111.
[84]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Unni Namboothiri', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 107.
[85]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Purathuvannapol', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 160; EMS Namboodiripad, 'Socialism: Enthinu, Engane', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 59.
[86]Namboodiripad, 'Purathuvannapol', 162.

allowed to conduct for his mother were the last rituals he would perform, marking a significant departure in his life as a Namboothiri.[87]

The interventions of reformers, especially those relating to marriage, family and the Namboothiri women's question, sought to alter the community radically. The Namboothiri reform project meant integrating a closed social group into the fast-changing social life of Kerala. At the same time, as far as the desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self was concerned, the reform project was limited in many ways. A significant content of reform connoted more of a re-subjectivation along a modern Brahmin identity that helped Namboothiris survive in the rapidly changing Kerala society than the desubjectivation of their Brahmin-ness per se. A typical Yogakshema Sabha meeting around the mid-1920s happened in

> …an exclusively conservative set-up, discussing how to bring about (only) essential transformations in the customs and traditions of the community — that too concerning only the lives of Namboothiri men — while maintaining the Namboothiriness intact…[88]

EMS himself was not removed from this mentality and retrospectively noted by way of self-criticism that:

> At that point of time, my view of progressiveness was limited to concerns such as securing school and college education, reforming [the Namboothiri] marriage and family system and tempering the rigidity of everyday practices related to ritual pollution; the concept of demolition of the caste system as such had not taken root in me. I had not developed a progressive outlook on matters relating to the worship of gods, temple rituals, and the authoritative texts that determine the beliefs and customary practices. …I would not dare to think about any transgression that could earn 'the wrath of god'.[89]

In EMS's memory, the reformers were a mixed set, consisting of those arguing for legal reform, the anti-caste thought of Narayana Guru, rationalist-atheistic ideas, and interventions of 'Ezhava leader' Sahodaran Ayyappan, as well as theists and Vedic

[87]Namboodiripad, 162.
[88]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Randu Nirahara Samarangal', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 154.
[89]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Oru Bhajanathinte Kadha', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 80.

thinkers.[90] And EMS would gradually arrive at a position he describes as 'anti-Brahminical'.[91] This shift was indicative of the deliberations within the reform movement between these ideologies, especially regarding the question of marriage. There emerged a debate among Namboothiris whether the reformist call for the end of the *adhivedana* system and the championing of *swajatheeya vivaham* would reinforce caste than result in any 'progressive' transformations.[92] One set of reformers viewed intra-caste marriages as a strategic means toward the ultimate goal of the upliftment of Namboothiri women. Only Namboothiri men had the freedom to marry outside caste — through *sambandham*. Once Namboothiri women achieve autonomy on par with Namboothiri men, the need for *swajatheeya vivaham* will disappear. And inter-caste marriages of both Namboothiri men and women will become possible, and caste differences will wither. The other group of reformers wanted Namboothiris to discard only those customs and practices unfit for the 'scientific era' and 'preserve the essence of the authentic Brahmin culture'.[93] They were inclined towards the perpetuation of the caste system, and marriage systems reformed accordingly. EMS sided with the former position, which he elaborated in the foreword he wrote for the reformist novel, *Aphante Makal*, published in 1931. EMS would argue that the long-term goal of reformism must be inter-caste marriages.[94]

At this juncture, the movement witnessed several initiatives aimed at corporeal reform – such as removing *kuduma* (tuft of hair distinguishing Namboothiri men) and *poonoolu* for men, discarding traditional ornaments and *ghosha* (purdah) and the adoption of upper garments for women. EMS had cropped his hair a couple of years before this organised removal of the tuft. In EMS's assessment, despite the limitations and contradictions involved, such initiatives could successfully generate sentiments among Namboothiri youth against the customs and traditions of Brahminism and *varnashrama dharmam*.[95] In this context, the young Namboothiri reformers extended

[90]Namboodiripad, 'Mithavatha-Viplava Chinthagathikal Samoohikarangath', 91.
[91]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Brahmanyathinunere', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 119.
[92]Namboodiripad, 118.
[93]Namboodiripad, 119.
[94]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Visala Lokathekku', 45.
[95]Namboodiripad, 'Brahmanyathinunere', 121.

support to Guruvayoor Satyagraha (1931-32), the agitation for entry of 'untouchable castes' into the Guruvayoor temple. Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham felicitated the campaigners of the Satyagraha in Thrissur.[96] Moreover, *Unni Namboothiri* covered the event extensively, and EMS reported it for the magazine. EMS recalled the 'scintillating effect' that the inauguration of the Guruvayoor Satyagraha, the speeches by various leaders, and the Satyagraha camp had filled him.[97] EMS's excitement marks a significant transition, considering that it was only a few years ago (around the mid-1920s); as a Brahmin devotee at Guruvayoor, he would not feel 'any discomfort' with the rigid caste discrimination he witnessed inside the temple.[98] The fear of the 'wrath of gods' had been overcome with the desire for social change.

Parallelly, ideas of 'revolution' drawn from European contexts[99] and the radical strain within the community reform movement nudged EMS towards the idea of transcendence of the Brahmin self and the adoption of a universal, human self. For EMS, this shift necessitated a reflection on socio-cultural issues affecting all communities, including the question of the caste system and religious superstitions. EMS's budding interest in a journalistic and 'public' career nurtured by his readings on a wide range of topics also prompted him to think beyond the community.[100] EMS's association with the Yuvajana Sangham in his college days in Thrissur between 1929 and 1932, especially with the *Unni Namboothiri* magazine and its de-facto editor VT, was a turning point in this direction. From being VT's assistant, EMS, at his twenty-one years of age, became the magazine's assistant editor,[101] doing a variety of tasks not limited to writing about community issues but also composing original or translated articles on other subjects, summarising news, making reports and reviewing books.[102] EMS states that as a magazine propagating radical ideas regarding the Namboothiri community, *Unni Namboothiri* could not isolate itself from the questions concerning the broader Kerala society and nation. Later, EMS would classify his writings in the magazine spanning

[96]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Gandhi-Irwin Sandhikkusesham', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 136.
[97]Namboodiripad, 137.
[98]Namboodiripad, 'Oru Bhajanathinte Kadha', 80.
[99]Namboodiripad, 'Mithavatha-Viplava Chinthagathikal Samoohikarangath', 89.
[100]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 65.
[101]Namboodiripad, 'Samoola Parivarthanathinte Onnara Noottandu', 17.
[102]Namboodiripad, 'Unni Namboothiri', 2008, 103.

topics like Namboothiri reform and atheism as of 'bourgeois democratic' character.[103] EMS records that the weekly gradually came to side with a 'leftist nationalism' represented by Jawaharlal Nehru.[104] Activities in this perspectival direction — wide reading, careful tracking of everyday events, and writing — led to meticulous study and interaction with individuals possessing expertise in specific domains, thereby further opening EMS to a broader intellectual vista.

Anti-colonial Influences

In the 1920s, Malabar witnessed momentous political events such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Khilafat agitation and the fateful Malabar Rebellion of 1921, significantly impacting its society and politics. As a young Namboothiri curious about the world around him, EMS could not resist these socio-political occurrences from shaping his worldviews and sense of the self. EMS was privy to conversations in family circles on Home Rule League and leaders like Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Descriptions of the first Provincial Committee meeting of the Indian National Congress (hereafter, Congress) in 1921,[105] held in Ottapalam and attended by his acquaintances, would leave an impression on him.[106] EMS especially mentions his admiration for Tilak, a Brahmin who enjoyed a divine aura among Namboothiris; Tilak was seen as the incarnation of God, and his political interventions and death were seen accordingly.[107]

EMS's evolving interior life, mediated by his meticulous habit of reading newspapers and books that broadened his knowledge of the national movement, would shape EMS's self in distinct ways. EMS credits the biographies of Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi authored by K P Kesava Menon, who had headed the Congress-Khilafat committee, as the first 'political literature' he read.[108] The launch of the nationalist newspaper *Mathrubhumi* in 1923, published a week thrice from Kozhikode, supplied

[103]Namboodiripad, 'Samoola Parivarthanathinte Onnara Noottandu', 17.
[104]Namboodiripad, 'Unni Namboothiri', 2008, 105.
[105]After the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress in 1920 decided to organise provincial Congress committees on linguistic basis, the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) was formed.
[106]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Indiayum Keralavum: Irupathukalil', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 22.
[107]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Khilafat', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 39.
[108]Namboodiripad, 'Indiayum Keralavum', 21.

EMS with a steady flow of information and analyses about nationalist activity in India and Kerala.[109] Another periodical EMS read was *Al Ameen,* brought out as a tri-weekly under the editorship of Mohammed Abdur Rahiman, a prominent nationalist based in Malabar.[110] Once he started school in 1925, EMS would begin reading English newspapers like *The Hindu* and books on the national struggle.[111]

Of the many national leaders, Gandhi commanded a disproportionate influence on EMS's personality, eventually determining his relationship with the national struggle and Congress. Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement, Khilafat Movement, position against untouchability and exhortations for Hindu-Muslim unity had a particularly stirring effect on EMS. It had conscientized EMS to the fault lines in society and presented him with an avenue to change the world.[112] The concept of *daridranarayanan*, the poorest of the poor, advanced by Gandhi had a distinct appeal to EMS.[113] The Congress-Khilafat movement had inspired EMS profoundly, and he would treasure the 'Swaraj note' (the receipt of his family's contribution to the Tilak Swaraj fund) given by the volunteers of the movement.[114] Although EMS would gain a fuller understanding of the Khilafat agitation only years after the violent Malabar Rebellion, the movement and its Muslim participants left a mark on the young boy.[115] And despite Khilafat agitation's failure to achieve its objectives, EMS continued to repose his faith in the Gandhian leadership.[116] A poignant moment in this phase was EMS's experience of glimpsing Gandhi, the first national leader he would see in person, in Thrissur in 1923. EMS had gone with his friends to see him and was moved by being part of the mass gathering, which had thronged to see and touch Gandhi's feet rather than listen to his speech.[117]

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[109]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 64.
[110]EMS Namboodiripad, 'KPCCyil Aikyamunnani', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 294.
[111]Namboodiripad, 'School Vidyabhyasam', 74.
[112]Namboodiripad, 'Bolshevism', 9.
[113]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Congressum Idathupakshavum', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 29.
[114]Namboodiripad, 'Khilafat', 2008, 40.
[115]Namboodiripad, 42–43.
[116]Namboodiripad, 'Indiayum Keralavum', 23.
[117]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 66.

A significant incident that spoke to the perturbations within EMS was the imprisonment of his maternal uncle, Kuroor Neelakantan Namboothiripad and another Namboothiri for the publication of seditious articles in a periodical called *Lokamanyan*. Following Gandhi's call, individuals like Kuroor had given up modern education and became full-time Congress activists. The arrest of Kuroor and his colleague created a furore and led to their *bhrasht* around 1921.[118] EMS came to admire them, who, through imprisonment, had broken the rules of caste and probably earned the 'wrath of gods'. Another person who left an indelible impression in EMS's mind was M P Narayana Menon, a lawyer from Valluvanad, sentenced to fourteen years of jail term.[119] However, the social sanctions and the attendant hardships these individuals endured did not deter EMS from developing an affinity for the national movement.

At this point, Gandhism aligned with EMS's growing fascination for 'revolution', a theme of abiding interest throughout his career. EMS considered Gandhian freedom struggle methods, including the Civil Disobedience programme inaugurated in 1921, as 'revolutionary'. There may be 'limitations' with the Gandhian theory of non-violence or his insistence on practices like *khadi*; but at that point, Gandhi was 'the leader of revolutionaries in India' for EMS.[120] In this regard, EMS's tryst with the Namboothiri reformers at Thrissur in 1921 had significantly moulded him along Gandhian ideas and practices. The politically oriented reformist Namboothiris EMS at Thrissur included *khadi*-clad, *charka*-spinning, Hindi-learning, ardent Gandhians and Congress supporters.[121] The interactions with them imparted EMS a nuanced understanding of Congress and the broader nationalist activity in Malabar. EMS was moved by the encounter with Gandhians so much that he started wearing *khadi* clothes (a habit followed until 1948) and learning Hindi.[122] Very soon, EMS developed a yearning to volunteer for the national movement.[123] However, community influences still imposed

[118]Namboodiripad, 66.
[119]Namboodiripad, 'Indiayum Keralavum', 27.
[120]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Parliamentaryparipadiyum Viplavapartyum', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 211; Namboodiripad, 'Indiayum Keralavum', 23.
[121]Namboodiripad, 'Pattanaparishkaram', 46–47.
[122]Namboodiripad, 47.
[123]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 65–66.

their grasp on EMS through the threat of *bhrasht,* dissuading him from participating in anti-British protests and courting arrest.[124]

School nurtured EMS's nationalist interests through sympathetic teachers, peers, and the ample supply of nationalist literature. During a school visit to Madras, EMS attended the 1927 Congress conference in the city.[125] EMS would take a lively interest in national politics from this point.[126] This meeting foreshadowed a change in EMS's sole adoration for Gandhi. EMS came to admire Jawaharlal Nehru, who vociferously debated for Poorna Swaraj in the Madras conference against the moderate Congress supporters led by his father, Motilal Nehru, who argued for dominion status granted by the Crown. EMS would return home as an advocate of the Poorna Swaraj.[127] At this point, EMS began to view Nehru, who headed the 'extremist' group of Congress members, as another revolutionary, perhaps more radical than Gandhi. Therefore, EMS made it a point to participate in the provincial Congress conference held in 1928 at Payyannur, attended by Nehru. As a Congress representative, EMS would vote for Poorna Swaraj and regard the passing of the resolution in favour of it as a personal victory.[128] The contentious proceedings between the two factions of Congress in Payyannur, the first experience for EMS, profoundly influenced the political man that he would become:

> The sharp weapons employed by both the factions— rational argumentation, searing affronts, laughter-evoking witticisms, accusations that hit the target, citations from *Puranas*, *Itihasas* and other literary texts and allusions to characters in them… amounted to valuable political education. …Although I would enter into contentious debate with many of those speakers at Payyannur later in life, what I gained from the first experience was matchless.[129]

However, the new frames of thought did not readily translate into the reconstitution of EMS's Namboothiri subjectivity. During the Payyannoor conference in 1928, for

[124]Namboodiripad, 'Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum', 38.
[125]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Madirasi Congressum Athinuseshavum', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 81.
[126]Namboodiripad, 'Congressum Idathupakshavum', 32.
[127]Namboodiripad, 'Madirasi Congressum Athinuseshavum', 84; Namboodiripad, 'Congressum Idathupakshavum', 32.
[128]Namboodiripad, 'Madirasi Congressum Athinuseshavum', 86.
[129]Namboodiripad, 85–86.

instance, although EMS had 'firmly' and passionately sided with the 'extremist' (or 'left wing') resolution of Poorna Swaraj, he was largely indifferent to the tenancy question that was discussed. Moreover, as a Congress representative, EMS voted in favour of the *jenmi* side against the tenants and recalled that 'At that point of time, I had in me the *jenmi* partisanship that was characteristic of my social background.'[130]

EMS's final schoolyear in Palakkad (1928-29), away from home and in the company of peers with 'superior knowledge' about national politics and social reform, too helped in EMS's intellectual shift from Gandhism to a left-leaning Congress activism.[131] It was a tumultuous period marked by the widening gap between 'extremists' and 'moderates', the tragic death of Lala Lajpat Rai, the Lahore and Meerut conspiracies and subsequent repression. The seeds of EMS's scepticism of Gandhi were laid in this period.[132] In the 1930s, marked by a widespread upsurge of mass participation, EMS would participate in various demonstrations, including campaigning for the Swadeshi movement, selling *khadi* clothes and picketing shops that sold foreign goods — these constituted new experiences for him.[133] EMS writes that the picketing demonstrations provided him with experience in handling opposition and resistance with patience, endurance and non-violence in action and thought; the stiff opposition from the affluent Christian textile merchants and their customers in Thrissur, in EMS's words, amounted to a 'political baptism'.[134] EMS would also study nationalist literature with renewed vigour and begin to write patriotic articles. Perhaps channelising his increasing admiration for Nehru, EMS wrote a short biography of Nehru in 1931, which also happens to be the first political pamphlet he authored.[135]

In the tumultuous period of the second Civil Disobedience Movement following the failure of the Gandhi-Irwin pact, EMS courted arrest from Kozhikode on 17th January 1932.[136] If EMS was pulled back by family ties, especially his sentiments for his mother

[130]Namboodiripad, 86.
[131]Namboodiripad, 'Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum', 38.
[132]Namboodiripad, 39.
[133]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Sajeeva Rashtreeyathinte Thudakkam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 130.
[134]Namboodiripad, 131–32; Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Visala Lokathekku', 43, 46.
[135]Namboodiripad, 'Sajeeva Rashtreeyathinte Thudakkam', 131; Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Visala Lokathekku', 45.
[136]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Jaililekku', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha

earlier, he had strengthened his resolve by 1932. 'Life is pointless should I withdraw myself from courting arrest this time too', he remarked to the family lawyer, who had been sent to discourage EMS from participating in the Civil Disobedience protest and risk arrest. Even more poignant was his meeting with his Sanskrit-Vedic *guru*, a father figure, who expressed pain at the possibility of physical injury for EMS at the hands of policemen.[137] For EMS, the experience marked a desubjectivation from his Namboothiri self — 'severance of the ties with my class', as he would describe it.[138] The arrest also marked the transition from 'a boy whose interest in politics was one among many to a young man wholly dedicated to political work'.[139] Nevertheless, EMS was sentimental about his mother, who was deeply anguished by his imprisonment.[140]

In his first jail term from January 1932 to August 1933, most of which was in Vellore, EMS met political prisoners across India. Life in Vellore was routinised, exercises in mornings and evenings, meals at fixed times and reading, writing and occasional meetings and discussions during the day.[141] EMS read proficiently during this time and authored several booklets, one of which was based on Trotsky's treatise on the Russian Revolution, which also critiqued the Bolshevik Party and Stalin.[142] In jail, EMS read English and Hindi literature. He learned Tamil and Urdu from other prisoners while teaching Sanskrit to some of them.[143] EMS also encountered left-leaning Congress activists during this time, an encounter which would result in a new subjectivation, that of a socialist.

The end of EMS's jail term in 1933 also marked a shift in nationalist politics, chiefly because of Gandhi's withdrawal from what he described as the 'political terrain' (of anti-colonial civil disobedience activities) towards the 'social' programme of Harijan upliftment movement. On the one hand, given EMS's 'progressive, social reformist' bent

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Publishers, 2008), 141.
[137]Namboodiripad, 140–41; EMS Namboodiripad, 'Eduthuchattam', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 48.
[138]Namboodiripad, 'Eduthuchattam', 47.
[139]Namboodiripad, 'Jaililekku', 141.
[140]Namboodiripad, 'Purathuvannapol', 158.
[141]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Jailjeevitham', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 144.
[142]Namboodiripad, 147.
[143]Namboodiripad, 147.

of mind, he found the Gandhian social programme as a logical culmination of the social reform movement he was part of.[144] Thus, EMS would participate in Harijan *seva* initiatives in Valluvanad even as he was becoming increasingly sceptical of Gandhism.[145] This included visiting Harijan settlements in villages, encouraging Harijan children to join schools and spreading awareness about cleanliness.[146] EMS accepted, at least partially, the Gandhian contention that the Harijan upliftment programme was a 'revolutionary movement that could uproot the entirety of the existing social order'. Thus, the 'extremists' would not be able to distance themselves from this 'non-political movement'.[147] Here, we can see that in addition to the anti-caste strands of thought acquired from the reform movement and his readings, the Gandhian Harijan programme provided another frame for EMS's desubjectivation process in terms of caste. On the other hand, EMS was not fully convinced of the effectiveness of the Gandhian 'social' programme for the 'political' goal of freedom. During his prison term, EMS had come to subscribe to the view of the emerging faction of Congress Socialists that the Harijan upliftment interventions would not be enough for securing freedom and that only a revolutionary programme would.[148] The failure of the Civil Disobedience movement led to a section within Congress reviving the demand for a parliamentary programme which had been scrapped earlier by the party. As Gandhi surrendered to this demand in 1934, EMS considered him as 'straying from the path of revolution'. Thereafter, he came to believe that programmes such as Harijan Seva Sangh and Khadi Gram Udyog were stumbling blocks for the revolutionary movement.[149]

Contentions and Reconciliations

The question arises about the fault lines of Gandhian praxis and intellectual orientation that compelled EMS to reposition his Gandhian locus. Although he commenced his political life as a Gandhian, EMS became a Gandhi critic after a decade. As a communist,

[144]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Gandhian Nethruthvathinte Randam Prathisandhi', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 53.
[145]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Muzhuvansamaya Rashtreeya Pravarthanathinte Thudakkam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 168.
[146]Namboodiripad, 169.
[147]Namboodiripad, 168.
[148]Namboodiripad, 'Gandhian Nethruthvathinte Randam Prathisandhi', 54.
[149]Namboodiripad, 'Parliamentaryparipadiyum Viplavapartyum', 212.

EMS evaluated the potential of Gandhian politics from a class angle; and he accepted both the creative aspect of Gandhi's class character (leadership in the anti-imperialist struggle) as well as its negative aspect (the supposed tendency to ally with caste-landlord-feudal power) and pointed out the class basis underlying both features.[150] To understand EMS's view of politics, we can consider Ranabir Samaddar's perspective. Samaddar argues that politics is a 'discourse of actions'; politics creates a subject, who is not subjected to a politics guided by others, but authors his/ her politics.[151] The emergence of the political subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was characterised by dissenting voices claiming a political space of action under 'certain common situations and common contentions'.[152] For EMS, Gandhi was a highly complex personality, and he was always intrigued by the meaning of Gandhism. EMS believed that Gandhi's teachings could not be over-simplified, and to arrive at simplistic conclusions or assessments that Gandhi was the inspirer of the national movement who roused the masses to anti-imperialist action or that Gandhi was the counter-revolutionary who did all he could to prevent the development of our national movement on revolutionary lines.[153] While EMS venerated Gandhian philosophy, he also understood equally its possibilities and limitations and that of the Gandhian plan of action. While valuing the philosophy, EMS partially rejected Gandhian strategies.

As we see, there was no complete desubjectivation of EMS from Gandhian influences. Instead, Gandhian subjectivation was reflected in EMS's embodied self throughout his life. As noted by his contemporaries, EMS possessed a disposition which rendered his interactions with political opponents gentle and affectionate. Apparently, EMS was hardly affected by impulse or personal enmity.[154] EMS disliked alcohol, and no one appeared before him drunk.[155] In the Gandhian elaboration of *panchsheel* (the

[150]See EMS Namboodiripad, 'Meaning of Gandhism', in *The Mahatma and the Ism*, Revised ed. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1981), 113–19.
[151]Ranabir Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), xviii.
[152]Samaddar, xv.
[153]EMS Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism*, Revised ed. (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1981), 118.
[154]Father Vadakkan, 'EMSinte Pratyekathakal', in *EMS Vaakum Samoohavum*, ed. Dr K Gopinathan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Current Books, 1998), 288.
[155]Raveendran, 'EMS: Chitrangal Prateethikal', in *EMS Vaakum Samoohavum*, ed. Dr K Gopinathan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Current Books, 1998), 344.

principles of peaceful coexistence), *aparigraha* (the state of not owning anything) was as crucial as *ahimsa* (non-violence). EMS is said to have religiously adhered to this value till his death.[156] EMS is known for the discipline he maintained in life and was particular about punctuality and cleanliness. For EMS, avoiding anger, hatred, and selfishness was a means to attain self-control. EMS's financial practices also had Gandhian influences. He lived an austere life without much expenditure.[157] The amalgamation of modern norms that EMS internalised in his early political life and the Gandhian principles later worked as an agent for his praxis and embodiment. The agential role of Gandhian ideology in the embodiment and its performativity can also be seen in EMS's intellectual self. ONV Kurup, for instance, observed that EMS's literary style mirrored his modest attire. Candidness and simplicity characterised his style of language.[158] Literary critic Sukumar Azhikode notes that EMS practised simplicity in personal life and was also less ostentatious in his language. Azhikode also adds that although Marx guided EMS's intellect, his heart was influenced by Gandhi. Gandhian attributes such as simplicity, clarity and naturalness characterised EMS's language style.[159] Thus, despite rejecting Gandhi's political methodology, EMS retained a deep respect for the Gandhian principles.

EMS says that it would be through this systematic learning of textual Marxism that he would shake off, inter alia, the legacy of Gandhian Non-Cooperation and Satyagraha struggles that had been 'glued to his heart'.[160] However, the shift from Gandhism to Marxism (through socialism) did not amount to a complete desubjectivation process; there was instead a re-subjectivation based on a combination of elements from both streams of thought:

> I take pride in the fact that it is the Gandhian values that I had acquired in the early stages of political life that made me a Communist. I claim that the working-class

[156]Nair S Gupthan, 'Marxisathinte Gandhianlalityam', in *EMS Vaakum Samoohavum*, ed. Dr K Gopinathan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Current Books, 1998), 422.
[157]For instance, Thoppil Bhasi records that EMS lived on an austere monthly budget: Thoppil Bhasi, *Olivile Ormakal* (Thiruvananthapuram: Prabath Book House, 2008).
[158]O N V Kurup, 'Snehaarham Saraladrumam', in *EMS Vaakum Samoohavum*, ed. Dr K Gopinathan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Current Books, 1998), 315.
[159]Sukumar Azhikode, 'Aksheenanaya Ezhuthkaran', in *EMS Vaakum Samoohavum*, ed. Dr K Gopinathan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Current Books, 1998), 323.
[160]Namboodiripad, 'Parliamentaryparipadiyum Viplavapartyum', 213.

> politics I implement in my life is a superior version of Mahatma's ideal of service to the poor. Hence, I claim that I am a Communist who was able to internalise the personality and philosophy of Gandhi.[161]

Left Ideologies

EMS's initiation into left ideas and movements had been through his engagements with/ in the print public sphere. EMS read books such as Ramsay MacDonald's *Socialism* and Harold Laski's *Communism in college*. EMS recollects, 'Although these texts were riddled with misinterpretations, they provided the first lessons in socialist-communist theories.'[162] EMS also came to read about the Soviet Union from sources (which he later regarded as 'incomplete' and 'erroneous') and from books written by Nehru and newspapers.[163] EMS's stint as an editorial assistant in *Unni Namboothiri* between 1929 and 1932 happened when the weekly was mainly coming to adopt a 'leftist nationalist' position advanced by Jawaharlal Nehru.[164] This juncture brought EMS closer to communist sympathisers, like KK Warrier and P Kesavadev, who used to contribute to *Unni Namboothiri* and from whom he gathered more about the ideology. Dev was open about his ideological affiliation and, as an ardent follower of Trotsky, wrote a book on him, *Agniyum Sphulingavum*.[165]

EMS's twenty-month imprisonment period for participation in Civil Disobedience Movement (1932-33), briefly in Kozhikode and Kannur jail and an extended period in Vellore jail was a turning point in EMS's ideological shift towards the left. During this time, EMS came under the influence of many left-leaning prisoners from across India, including communists, left-leaning Congress activists and Congress socialists. Some of these leaders included P Krishna Pillai,[166] Kiran Chandra Das, K N Tiwari, leaders of the Bengali revolutionary movement, Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar, especially Acharya Narendra Deva, and the leaders implicated in Lahore conspiracy

[161]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Mahathma Gandhiyude Mathadarsanam', in *Gandhisathil Ninnu Marxisathilekku*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1994), 17.
[162]Namboodiripad, 'College Vidyabhyasam', 99.
[163]Namboodiripad, 99–100.
[164]Namboodiripad, 'Unni Namboothiri', 2008, 105.
[165]Namboodiripad, 106.
[166]Namboodiripad, 'Gandhi-Irwin Sandhikkusesham', 134.

cases.[167] By then, EMS got a clear picture of the activities of the young nationalists at the India House in London and understood the various stages of the formation of the Communist Party of India by M N Roy, M P T Acharya and C R Pillai, under the guidance of Philip Spratt and Benjamin F Bradley from the British Communist Party. EMS also read enthusiastically about the Bolshevik revolutionaries from the jail.[168] All these led EMS away from Gandhism to the path of left political activism, which he hoped would ultimately bring revolution. Thus, the one and a half years spent in Vellore jail helped him meticulously study leftist revolutionary politics on the one hand and assess Gandhian politics on the other. When he left jail, EMS had arrived at a revolutionary stance that stepped around Gandhism and even Nehruvian socialism. EMS decided to dedicate his life to full-time political activism as part of the leftist revolutionary movement.[169]

At the end of the imprisonment, EMS began to be involved in peasant protests in Valluvanad against the arbitrary increase in agricultural taxes.[170] EMS had done so under the advice of Pillai, who had been organising factory workers in Thalassery and Kozhikode.[171] As the protest spread across Malabar, Malabar Karshaka Sangham (peasant union) was established. Furthermore, EMS began associating with the peasant movement and expanding his understanding of peasant problems.[172] In this period, EMS began to engage in 'theoretical' activities like studying and publishing articles about peasant issues and 'practical' activities towards building Karshaka Sangham, such as drafting resolutions, articles and pamphlets.[173] EMS acknowledges Krishna Pillai for engaging him in both the 'theoretical' and 'practical' aspects of organisational activity, marking the beginning of his full-fledged political career.[174]

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[167]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Viplavaprasthanathinte Kaivazhikal: Chila Vyakthikalum', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 148–49.
[168]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Bylanes of Revolutionary Movements and Certain Individuals', in *How I Became A Communist*, trans. P K Nair, vol. 1976 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 133–35.
[169]Namboodiripad, 'Purathuvannapol', 158.
[170]Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 59.
[171]Namboodiripad, 'Muzhuvansamaya Rashtreeya Pravarthanathinte Thudakkam', 170, 172; Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 59.
[172]Namboodiripad, 'Muzhuvansamaya Rashtreeya Pravarthanathinte Thudakkam', 170.
[173]Namboodiripad, 171–72.
[174]Namboodiripad, 172.

During this period, EMS began to view himself as a Congress Socialist. EMS retrospectively acknowledges the 'partial and vague' nature of his (as well as other Congress Socialists) knowledge of the basic premises of socialism.[175] Nevertheless, we can identify two significant influences that shaped EMS's Congress Socialist affiliation. The first was the utopian model provided by the Soviet Union. For EMS, USSR was an exemplar, harnessing the supposed prosperity gained through the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan while the rest of the world was staggering under the impact of the Great Depression.[176] Even the Trotskian critique of Stalin, on which EMS wrote a pamphlet during his jail term, had failed to create a dent in his admiration for the Soviet model, an influence so enduring, eventually guiding him to communism as well.[177] A second factor shaping EMS's Congress Socialism was Jayaprakash Narayan (referred to as JP). If Gandhi had been the guiding inspiration for EMS's affiliation with Congress, JP came to occupy that space, although briefly. JP's visit to Kerala in 1934 was 'a turning point' in EMS's political growth. The 'open and profound conversation' EMS and Krishna Pillai had with the socialist leader and the latter's speech in Kozhikode would convince them that socialism was not a mere long-term goal. It was also a means for India's freedom; the success of the freedom struggle impinges on the revolutionary participation of a resurgent working class and peasantry.[178]

Especially significant for EMS was the idea of 'Socialist Bardoli', a socialist order centred on the organisation of peasantry in villages, that J P proposed in 1935.[179] While elements from Gandhian mode exemplified in movements like the Bardoli Satyagraha can be emulated, J P's idea sought to repair its major limitation — the lack of a socialist goal, viz., the radical reorganisation of relations of production in agriculture. In other words, a 'Socialist Bardoli' would strive towards the end of feudalism that was at the root of the problems faced by the Indian peasantry.[180] EMS would apply this model to

[175]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Congress Socialist Party', in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 174.
[176]Namboodiripad, 174.
[177]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Congress Socialist-Communist Partykal', in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 208.
[178]Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 62.
[179]EMS Namboodiripad, '"Socialist Bardoli"', in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 217–20.
[180]Namboodiripad, 216–17; Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 63.

Malabar and imagine the region as a 'Socialist Bardoli' where peasants have been organized on the basis of the three problems against British imperialism and feudal land ownership.[181] If a Gandhian-Congress view of peasant problems had influenced EMS's earlier approach to peasant problems, EMS now got a socialist direction for the peasant politics he would engage in.

EMS's involvement with the peasant movement was a significant moment in his formation as a socialist and, later, communist intellectual and statesman. While organising protest movements against land tax in Malabar in the early-1930s, EMS began to study the impact of the tax rise in relation to agricultural indebtedness and the question of rent. This study shifted EMS's attention to the flaws of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929, especially the law's narrow scope, addressing only an affluent stratum of tenants, leaving out most of the rent-paying peasants. This insight prompted EMS to undertake a 'deeper' analysis of the nature of the landlord-tenant relationship. His understandings from this study significantly informed EMS's dissent note in the *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report* of1940 (chapter IV will discuss aspects of EMS's note of dissent). EMS became the committee member during his short tenure in 1939 as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in the Madras Presidency. The Committee witnessed 'massive peasant demonstrations' in each taluk, where they had spent a few days each gathering evidence for the Report. For EMS, the tour was 'personally, a new experience', where he learnt to reconcile his role as an insider (legislator) with that of an outside (dissenter).[182]

In 1934, Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed in Kerala, seeking to work as a left-leaning group within the Congress. Gradually, CSP began to differentiate itself from the official Congress policies, and a polarisation happened along the lines of 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' Congress groups in Kerala.[183] The positions adopted by EMS as a Congress Socialist were connected to his desubjectivation process. For instance, CSP supported the community-based mobilisation of Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians within

[181]Namboodiripad, '"Socialist Bardoli"', 218.
[182]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Munnettathinte Adyavarshangal', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 73.
[183]EMS Namboodiripad, 'AdyatheIdathupaksha KPCC', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 191–93.

the Abstention Movement launched in 1932 in Travancore, viewing it as a 'progressive' and 'democratic' development, while the mainstream Congress leaders dismissed it as 'reactionary'.[184] The rationale behind this position, as laid out by EMS, was that,

> The common people who refuse to suffer under the yoke of political dominance of *savarna* Hindus and economic domination of *jenmi* class may resort to forms of protest other than organised workers' or peasant movements. Their dissent may take the form of protests demanding their rights as depressed castes and religious minorities.[185]

EMS's move from the Namboothiri reform movement coincided with this juncture. And EMS distinguished the Namboothiri community mobilisation from that of 'depressed castes and religious minorities':

> For a community like Namboothiris, progress is attainable only as part of a shared social reform agenda applicable to all of society, while depressed castes and religious minorities, as communities in themselves, have a long way to go; in terms of redressing disabilities and securing demands.[186]

EMS's passage from Congress Socialism — in his words, 'left-leaning bourgeois nationalism' — to communism happened towards the late-1930s.[187] In this period, he had come into contact with different groups of communists — at first, the 'M N Roy group' in Patna in 1934 and later, the 'official communist group' in Bombay in the same year. The Roy group had maintained frequent contact with the Congress Socialists in Malabar, including EMS.[188] As the seventh Communist International in Moscow in 1935 endorsed a popular front of communist and non-communist forces against fascism and imperialism, a few Congress Socialists, including EMS, would get in touch with 'official communists' through Sundarayya.[189] Sundarayya and SV Ghate granted EMS membership of the Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI) in 1936.[190]

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[184]EMS Namboodiripad, '"Prabhatham" Varika', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 197.
[185]Namboodiripad, 198.
[186]Namboodiripad, 198.
[187]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 84.
[188]Namboodiripad, 'Congress Socialist-Communist Partykal', 206.
[189]Namboodiripad, 210.
[190]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Krishna Pillai, Sundarayya, Ghate', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 200.

EMS's reflections on the nature of his approach to communism and the influences of pioneer communist leaders reveal the subjective dimensions of the ideological shift. EMS identified in leaders like P Sundarayya, Amir Hyder Khan and SV Ghate qualities befitting communists, including organisational skills, efficiency, and discipline.[191] As luminaries who initiated EMS into communism, their personalities and values played a significant role in EMS's subjectivation as a communist. In the subsequent years, EMS would meet many communists like Bankim Mukherjee, Dr Ashraf and Jalal-ud-Din Bukhari in national-level meetings, influencing him in many ways. While Bukhari's exemplary organisational skills attracted EMS, Dr Ashraf's capacity as a historian, journalist and other intellectual roles appealed to him.[192] Soli Batlivala was distinguished for his enthusiastic speeches that moved the crowds and his organisational skills.[193] EMS credits Sundarayya for providing a perspective that was 'more comprehensive' and 'superior' to Congress Socialism through elaborate conversations and ideological clarifications.[194] Sundarayya's simplicity of life, despite his wealthy background, was another quality EMS noted. EMS himself would lead a simple life, transitioning from a joint Namboothiri *jenmi* family to a nuclear, middle-class, labouring family. EMS would donate his property to the party. EMS's family, including his wife and children, survived with the remuneration from the communist party and the royalty earned from his books.[195]

EMS allocates a vital role for Krishna Pillai in initiating him to communism, despite drawing the contrast in their journeys towards communism.[196] EMS writes that Krishna Pillai, on account of his birth in a poor, peasant, 'non-*jenmi*' family, having toiled as a worker, engaged in workers' protests and strikes, and struggled and rebelled as a prisoner, had been 'emotionally' and 'intellectually' predisposed to communist ideas.[197] On the contrary, EMS hailed from a prosperous *jenmi* background; he experienced a

[191]Namboodiripad, 203–4.
[192]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Samrajyavirudha Aikyam Congress Vediyil', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 245–46.
[193]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Batlivalayum Royiyum', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 279.
[194]Namboodiripad, 'Krishna Pillai, Sundarayya, Ghate', 201.
[195]Namboodiripad, 'Samoola Parivarthanathinte Onnara Noottandu', 19.
[196]Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 59.
[197]Namboodiripad, 'Krishna Pillai, Sundarayya, Ghate', 202–3.

relatively comfortable jail term — owing to his *tharavadi* (privileged) background — among elite Congress leaders who would ridicule leaders of the likes of Pillai and AK Gopalan (hereafter, AKG). Krishna Pillai could perceive beyond the 'limited circle' of nationalist figures like Gandhi, Nehru and Bose and see them as 'bourgeoisie symbols'.[198] EMS, however, would be influenced by national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Bose; and had become attracted to communism more from an 'intellectual' than 'emotional' standpoint.[199]

As EMS began to associate with the polit bureau of CPI, which appointed him as a member of the 'communist fraction' in the all-India executive of CSP in 1937, he traced a transition in his engagements with other comrades and within his self: the transformation from being a 'half-communist' and of the affective relations he had with members like Sundarayya and Ghate to a more formal capacity as a party functionary with official responsibilities.[200] Nevertheless, he would develop emotional attachments even within such formal roles.[201] Through various intellectual deliberations at the national, regional, and local levels in the form of conferences and meetings, EMS allowed himself to be moulded as a communist; in between, he also participated in these processes and made his contributions. He was guided by policy formulations of CPI, CSP and INC and partook in nationalist politics as a communist, negotiating with Congress and socialists simultaneously.

Here, it is pertinent to mention that a distinct self-perception of his abilities characterised EMS's assessment of his place in the communist movement. EMS considered himself as defined by more of a dispassionate, intellectual (*vicharaparam*) approach to communism and the party than an emotional (*vikaraparam*) approach. This purported division EMS makes between his intellectual vis-à-vis experiential orientations can be connected to the communist party organisation, which emphasised the division between intellectuals and those involved in mass mobilisation.[202] However,

[198]Namboodiripad, 202.
[199]Namboodiripad, 202–3; Namboodiripad, 'Eduthuchattam', 50.
[200]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Bhardwaj', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 253–54.
[201]Namboodiripad, 256.
[202]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 35.

there were moments when the emotional and the affective would come into play within EMS. For example, is EMS's experience of a massive rally of workers in Calicut in September 1937. The sight of thousands of workers marching in red flags, shouting slogans, and raising demands moved EMS.[203] Although hailing from a different class, EMS began to feel a merging of the self with the working class:

> I would be a jubilant witness to many more proletarian-peasant demonstrations in the future, including the majestic rally at Alleppey in the following year. However, the march at Kozhikode was a prelude to all such proletarian demonstrations; it offered me, for the first time, a vivid picture of the collective strength of the working class. Of the many incidents that brought me, an offspring of a different class, closer to the working class, the Kozhikode rally is etched into my memory.[204]

EMS would also reconcile with the 'emotional' and the 'intellectual' when he went underground for twenty-seven months between 1939 and 1942.[205] EMS had been issued an arrest warrant for authoring the biography of Jatindra Nath Das, the Bengali socialist revolutionary. So, in consultation with central leadership, Pillai assigned an 'intellectual' role to EMS, and he dedicated himself to reading, studying and expanding his 'limited Marxist-Leninist theoretical knowledge'.[206] EMS would 'meticulously study' the ideology from a series of books, including Emile Burns' *A Handbook of Marxism* and twelve volumes of collected works of Lenin.[207] This schooling in Marxism underground was a critical factor in EMS's desubjectivation process. Alongside the 'intellectual' literature, EMS would read creative works and literary publications depicting life in Soviet countries and the proletarian-mass struggles in capitalist countries. Accounts of underground activities in Nazi Germany and enthralling narratives on guerrilla warfare in European countries attacked by Nazis and the anti-Japanese struggles in China were plentily available. EMS was particularly moved by the execution of Zoya, a Komsomol

[203]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Avakasaprakhyapana Dinam', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 271.
[204]Namboodiripad, 274.
[205]Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 84.
[206]Namboodiripad, 81.
[207]Namboodiripad, 'Parliamentaryparipadiyum Viplavapartyum', 213; Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 84.

girl, by the Nazis. EMS recollects the effect of this intellectual-affective experience as follows:

> Reading these works gave me a new emotional perspective, while the fundamental Marxian texts transformed me intellectually. It became my life goal to explain in any way possible about these books and their contents to my comrades.[208]

The underground life also saw EMS revisiting the tension emerging from the conflict between his socio-political convictions and the emotional ties binding him to family members, who were far removed from his intellectual and ideological life. In the initial phase of EMS's public career as a Namboothiri reformer and Congress nationalist, EMS was torn apart by the distressing impacts of his actions on his mother. After the death of his mother, EMS experienced the same with his wife, Arya Antarjanam, who had to endure the instability associated with her husband's life as a communist. This included experiences like the agonising period of underground life during 1939-42 and 1948-52, confiscation of EMS's property for alleged infractions, and police surveillance. EMS's decision to donate his properties to the party had incensed his wife's family.[209] However, EMS acknowledged the support he received from his wife, who stood by him despite her family's reservations.[210] At the same time, EMS also reflects that while his mother and wife were close to him in emotions and life, they were miles apart in their outlook and life practices.[211]

A related self-perception of EMS concerned his experience of/ in 'active politics' (*sajeeva rashtreeyam*).[212] In terms of his engagement in the national movement or his later career as a leftist political leader, EMS cites his relatively limited organisational and practical (*prayogika*) experience. Even when he was part of movements, EMS was more involved in its 'theoretical' (*thathvika*) activities. Part of the reason why EMS would consider himself more of an intellectual/ theorist than an active political worker was his

[208]Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 85.
[209]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Snehavaippinteyum Verpadinteyum Nalukal', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 100.
[210]Namboodiripad, 100–101.
[211]EMS Namboodiripad, 'The Agony of Attachment and Separation', in *Reminiscences of an Indian Communist*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1987), 96.
[212]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Keralam Communisathinu Valakkoorulla Mannu', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 226.

stammer. In fact, the stammer was explicitly mentioned in the lookout circular released by police after EMS went underground. So, Krishna Pillai, in consultation with central leadership, assigned 'intellectual' tasks to EMS during this phase.[213] The speech 'defect' would cause a certain reluctance, stage fright and misgiving about his ability to explain political positions on stage. As a result, EMS would abstain from addressing crowds in his early life as a communist. In his first experience speaking on stage at a peasant meeting at Thiruthurappundi in Thanjavur in the late-1930s, EMS would limit his speech to a few formal words of address.[214] It would be a few years before EMS overcame these inhibitions and became known as an orator.

The underground experience would familiarise EMS with the 'practical' organisational aspects of communist work. At the beginning of the underground days, Krishna Pillai had acted as the 'itinerant' centre of the party, travelling across Kerala and coordinating the activities of CPI; and the hideout where EMS was located became its 'stationery' centre.[215] However, after Pillai's arrest in 1939, EMS stepped into the shoes of Pillai, functioning as the party's state secretary from December 1940 to May 1942. Sundarayya had convinced EMS that although he might not possess the organisational skills of Pillai, he would be able to sustain the party through the tumultuous and agonising period of state repression. EMS could effectively run the party as the CPI state secretary, thanks to the 'foolproof' coordination system Pillai had instituted. Alongside, EMS would apply himself to publishing pamphlets for the party. The 'Party Letter' EMS published for about eighteen months, using the cyclostyle machine (which was banned then) would keep the party units informed of contemporary developments.[216] The party, under EMS, also managed to access a hand-press and brought out a few chapters of *History of CPSU (B)*, another textbook recommended for the conversion from left bourgeois nationalism to communism.[217] As EMS steered the party through this turbulent period, he grew self-confident in his abilities.[218]

[213]Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 81.
[214]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Thiruthurappundi', in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 276.
[215]Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 80.
[216]Namboodiripad, 82, 84–85.
[217]Namboodiripad, 84.
[218]Namboodiripad, 83.

With respect to his self-perception, EMS's self-comparison was with leaders like Krishna Pillai and A K Gopalan:

> I lacked an advantage Krishna Pillai, and other comrades had — I did not possess the first-hand experience of organising protests and strikes or essential organisational skills, neither then nor now.[219]

EMS subsequently reconciled with and appreciated his role in the communist movement. Although it did not involve direct and active participation in organising protests and strikes, he could make 'effective contributions' to the growth of peasant-proletarian movements and struggles.[220] EMS identified his 'ability to propagate anti-feudal and anti-imperial ways of thought', which Pillai or AKG did not have, barring a few individuals who could effectively utilise this ability like K Damodaran and P Narayanan, EMS considered himself as 'remarkable' in this respect.[221] Intellectuals like him had played a role in operationalising the Marxist-Leninist principle of 'expanding class warfare beyond the economic sphere to theoretical and political realms'. This work was vital in the cultivation of 'revolutionary consciousness among the masses' and complemented the work of 'real organisers' of the movement like Krishna Pillai and AKG.[222]In fact, EMS acknowledges Krishna Pillai for engaging him in both the 'theoretical' and 'practical' aspects of organisational activity, marking the beginning of his full-fledged political career.[223]

The underground days also resulted in the desubjectivation of EMS as a Congress Socialist and portended a new subjectivation into a communist. The novelty of experience in terms of the social setting, the routine of life and working styles constituted for EMS, 'a new life itself'.[224] For, it was the period when EMS experienced first-hand the lives of the 'working class' he had read and imagined about for more than a decade:

[219]Namboodiripad, 'Keralam Communisathinu Valakkoorulla Mannu', 230.
[220]Namboodiripad, 231.
[221]Namboodiripad, 230.
[222]Namboodiripad, 231.
[223]Namboodiripad, 'Muzhuvansamaya Rashtreeya Pravarthanathinte Thudakkam', 172.
[224]Namboodiripad, 'Olivujeevitham', 80.

> It was the first time I encountered the life of those described by Mahatma Gandhi as 'daridranarayanas'. In terms of the class analytic paradigm commonly used today, my hosts were semi-proletarian rural poor. A toddy-taping family, to be precise. I kept shifting my location every six months. I would eat with them. Under their watch, trusted comrades shifted me from place to place. I became closely acquainted with the poor and middle-class lives in that region of Malabar. It was a preparatory phase before the working classes in Kerala embraced me, a member of a wealthy, *savarna* family, as their adoptive son.[225]

For EMS, the uniqueness of this shift in mentality is the 'de-classification' he went through, unlike other 'bourgeois', 'upper-caste' individuals like Nehru or M Visveswaraya.[226] At the same time, EMS was aware of his caste-class position with respect to his engagements in the communist party:

> People like me, or those from my background, who became Bolsheviks formed a minuscule minority in Kerala. Most hailed from 'lower castes', workers, peasants and other labouring classes.[227]

In contrast to the Gandhian path of popular struggles based on non-violence, Communists formulated an outlook that envisioned the removal of the British and its Indian sympathisers from power through non-violence if possible and by force if needed. EMS understood and internalised the social principles and practices of Gandhism and Leninism. Gandhi gave the idea of public service along the lines of non-violence and utmost discipline. In contrast, Lenin believed that people had the ability and intelligence to conduct themselves autonomously in political life. Thus, organising and making people aware of the issues was only necessary.[228] The activism that was undertaken in this capacity, and the relationship that he cultivated with the Indian communists, facilitated EMS's shift from Congress to Congress Socialism and eventually to communism.

In the 1940s, EMS declared his communist affiliation publicly and emerged as a spokesperson for the party in the Malayalam public sphere. Till 1941, communists in

[225]Namboodiripad, 80–81.
[226]Namboodiripad, 'Bolshevism', 12.
[227]Namboodiripad, 10.
[228]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Leninum Gandhiyium', in *EMSinte SampoornaKritikal (1954 Dec-1956 Nov)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 16 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2001), 113.

Kerala had been guided by the idea of armed struggles to capture power. Thus, EMS would propagate Lenin's call to 'transform the imperialist war into civil war' in his writings while being underground as the party line for World War II.[229] The turning point for the Communist Party in Kerala was the Kayyur incident in March 1941 in northern Malabar, when armed peasant unions attacked the police. This had invited the suppression of communist activity.[230] As the ban was lifted in 1942, the party adopted the People's War line that advocated class harmony and cooperation with the state.[231] Communists began to support British efforts in World War II based on the principle of 'proletarian internationalism'. In the process, communists came into collision with nationalists who refused to cooperate with Britain in the ensuing war and launched the Quit India Movement in 1942. These shifts in the party line necessitated explanations and clarifications. At this juncture, EMS Namboodiripad had begun to defend and clarify misconceptions about the Communist International, communism and the shifting stances of the party in the Malayali public sphere. The leftist nationalists who were peers of EMS before his underground days could not comprehend EMS's opposition to the Quit India Movement. The resulting discontent and charge of 'betrayal' troubled EMS; however, EMS understood the experience with ideological conviction, characterising it as a formative element of becoming a communist — the beginning of the series of 'trials' communists would have to endure.[232]

Instead of contextualising EMS's socialist and Marxist phase vis-à-vis the broader history of left movements in India, this section looks at the ontological influences of left political ideas in EMS Namboodiripad and sees how they influenced his idea of justice and notions of freedom and liberty that were articulated as well as cemented in Kerala. Although Socialism and Marxism were doctrines that came from outside EMS's cultural locations, he constantly attempted to translate them into local contexts. For EMS, the search for scientific knowledge and rationality led to Marxism.[233] Marxism later became

[229]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Samrajyathvayudhathilninnu Janakeeyayudhathilekku', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 89.
[230]Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 166–68.
[231]Menon, 189.
[232]Namboodiripad, 'Samrajyathvayudhathilninnu Janakeeyayudhathilekku', 95.
[233]EMS Namboodiripad, 'College Education', in *How I Became A Communist*, trans. P K Nair (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 89.

a way of seeing and understanding the world, a framework that EMS internalised. One of the first articles written by EMS on Marxism was in 1939 in *Prabatham*. The article laid out the basics of Marxism to Malayali readers, essentially translating into an act of public pedagogism. In the process, EMS had begun to internalise the idea of 'labour theory of value' as a way of seeing and understanding the world.[234] To claim to be a Marxist, there were two critical aspects EMS had identified. The first is an idea of the 'human being'. EMS believed that the basic premise of world literature is the struggles of human progress. Maxim Gorky's statement, 'Human-What a dignified name,' moved him.[235] EMS articulated his ideas of the human thus:

> Human beings are the most lovable and deserve respect. The life of human beings is to make it happier. This does not necessarily mean that the people I met have been leading a lavish life… To state that their life is insufferable would amount to insulting them. For, I have seen a flow of life that surpasses all these hardships in the midst of which they are—of a whole and joyous life. Have you listened to the groups of women on the banks of lagoons singing and swearing as they beat coconut husks for ten to twelve hours, a work which pays them only two or three annas a day? Have you listened to the words and verses of an impoverished peasant who uses the four annas you pay out of love for alcohol? Have you looked into the faces of grandmothers who enquire about the parents and wives of those like us in hiding and who sigh in despair as to when this pain will end? If you have, you will agree that the human heart and mind are inclined to seek perfection amidst suffering, a trait that transcends adversity.[236]

A second fundamental precept of Marxism was identifying society in terms of classes and the notion of class struggle. According to EMS, he learned from his life that,

> Although human beings are capable of being loved, those who dominate others—they occupy two-thirds of the globe, including our part of the world—must be hated. Exhilarating as it may have been to witness the best in humanity, I have also been waging war from when I was ten-twelve years of age against those traditions and customs that reduce this greatness in man to loathing and aversion. The baseness exhibited by the representatives of tradition and custom (of which I have first-hand experience) has enraged and repulsed

[234]Namboodiripad, 'Marxian Dhanasasthrathinte Adisthana Thathvangal'.
[235]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Jeevitham Ente Nottathil', in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1952 Feb-May)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 11 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2000), 97.
[236]Namboodiripad, 96–97.

> me. After choosing the vocation of a full-time politician, I have concluded that it is impossible to love or honour men without casting out those responsible for the heinous acts I have seen, heard or experienced.[237]

We see that EMS had begun to conduct himself as a communist while performing these actions.[238] In 1944, he drafted a pamphlet with codes for cultivating a communist self and instructions for disciplined party work.[239] The members' commitment to the party was conceptualised and designed in such a way that, in effect, the party workers were bounded towards and within the party structure emotionally as well as organisationally. The party constitution drafted in 1931 defined a structural/organisational mechanism that follows the principles of inner-party democracy and democratic centralism. Inner party democracy ordained that a member in the lowest committee and a member in the highest committee bore equal rights and responsibilities to express opinions on the drafting of the programs and the working of the party. After multiple discussions at different levels, decisions were made democratically within the party, which constituted democratic centralism. In EMS's elaboration, the party believed that factors like caste and religion were inconsequential to the making of the different layers of the party; exploring such identitarian tendencies was against 'party discipline'.[240] The sole criterion for leadership was the performance of the workers amongst the people and within the party.[241]

Years later, EMS would critically reflect on how party discipline was understood at the time. Those who expressed reservations about the party line that prioritised proletarian internationalism over national struggle were dubbed as being influenced by bourgeois nationalism.[242] Along with the firm insistence on proletarian internationalism by party leadership, especially PC Joshi, EMS critiques the prevalent idea of organisational structure as 'flawed'. Moreover, the 'iron discipline' characteristic of

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[237]Namboodiripad, 97.
[238]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Saghavum Njanum', in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1954 Dec- 1956 Nov)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 16 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2001), 234–35.
[239]Such interventions by EMS can be compared to exercises elsewhere, for example, Liu Shao-Chi, *How to Be a Good Communist*, 1st ed. (Peking, China: Foreign Language Press, 1951).
[240]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Achadakathode Pravarthikuka', in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1944-1945)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 5 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1999), 233–55.
[241]Namboodiripad, 234.
[242]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Onnam Party Congress', in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 103.

communist parties was understood as uncritical acceptance of directives from top leadership and their faithful implementation.[243] EMS says, 'There was no criticism and self-criticism, an integral part of that inner-party democracy on whose basis alone genuine centralisation and iron discipline can be built.'[244] EMS admits that he and leaders like Krishna Pillai, AKG and CH Kanaran were not free of this uncritical acceptance of Joshi's policy. A possible cause for the 'ideological and political' weakness, despite the strength it revealed — the conviction to defend their vision of a socialist nation at the cost of the fury of their political adversaries — was 'the emotional affinity for the Soviet land'.[245]

Ascetic Modalities

EMS also came to argue for and embody a communist self structured around specific ideas of sexuality and bodily disposition. This can be discerned from EMS's response to an article in *Mathrubhumi Weekly* about the 'conduct of communists' based on a comparison between Gandhi and Stalin. The *Mathrubhumi* article portrayed Gandhi as morally superior for his monogamous status, whereas Stalin was portrayed as immoral for marrying more than once. In his response, EMS observed/pointed out the prominence of polygamy or divorce in Malayali social life (except for communities like Catholic Christians) until the formation of public opinion and law favouring monogamy in the nineteenth century. EMS pointed out that India, like the Soviet Union, China, the United States, Britain, and some Islamic states, had followed polygamy and the practice of divorce. EMS also drew examples of men and women with 'questionable morality' from Indian epics, those gods and mortals who engaged in polygamous, incestual and sexual relations before marriage. Such figures, including Dasaratha, Panchali, Vyasa, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, and Krishna, were and are considered ideals of 'ethical life' in India.[246] EMS, therefore, was underlining a pragmatic approach to the popular

[243]Namboodiripad, 104.
[244]EMS Namboodiripad, 'The First Party Congress', in *Reminiscences of an Indian Communist*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1987), 99.
[245]Namboodiripad, 'Onnam Party Congress', 106–7.
[246]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Marxisavum Saanmaargikabodhavum', in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1947-49)*, 1st ed., vol. 8 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1999), 283–84.

perception of moral values, which might not fit in with hand-held principles of ethics and morality that shaped exemplar personal lives like Gandhi's.

Early-twentieth century Malayali social reformers had been extensively concerned with the reorganisation of kinship relations, especially in the context of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century debate on the reform of the matrilineal *marumakkathaya* tradition among several castes in Kerala towards the patrilineal system.[247] Evolutionary anthropology had been utilised for the cause of the reform. The debate had also been taken up by reform-minded Namboothiris, who problematised the community's implication in the system through *sambandham* and the plight of the unwed Namboothiri women. Some of them had argued in favour of the patrilineal system and had viewed the hypergamous relationship between the Nair women and Namboothiri men as essentially a decadent practice that resulted in the deterioration of the community.[248] EMS's view on sexuality had been conditioned by these debates and led him to connect monogamy as the ideal form of kinship. In particular, EMS had been influenced by the ideas of the nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan and Friedrich Engel's reading of Morgan. These readings provided EMS with an evolutionary view of the progress of civilisations and the emergence of the monogamous family system in society. Thus, EMS rationalised the varied perceptions of morality in Indian social structures, which might be antithetical to the communist constitution of 1931 but should not be forced out in this refashioning of the communist self. However, at the same time, EMS failed to harness the radical potential in Engels' thought that connected the rise of private property to the control of female sexuality. The evolutionary perspective EMS subscribed led him to portray polygamy as an example of the stage of 'beastly' sexual life mankind had passed through. Accordingly, it was only with reform and human progress that forms of regulation of sexual life such as monogamy appeared.[249]

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[247]For an analysis of the developments around the reform of matriliny in Kerala, see G Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar, c. 1850-1940*, 1st ed. (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2003).

[248]See for instance, Poomulli Thuppan Namboothiripad, 'Nammude Thalkalasthithi', in *Samudaayabodham*, ed. V S Narayanan Namboothiri, 1st ed., Edapalli Upasabha Grandhavali 1 (Thrissur: The Mangalodayam Co Ltd, 1914), 10–14.

[249]Namboodiripad, 'Marxisavum Saanmaargikabodhavum', 284.

Although EMS is against 'traditional moral consciousness that considers sexuality sinful', he is also against the notion that 'unbridled sexuality is the pinnacle of revolution'.[250] In this respect, EMS critiqued the practice of 'loose sexual life' among the upper castes portrayed in the nineteenth-century *Venmani* poems, as well as contemporary writers such as Thakazhi, Changampuzha, Basheer and Kesavadev, who, according to EMS portrayed the bourgeois values of man-woman relationships.[251] Refuting the *Mathrubhumi* article, EMS wrote that

> Only those who blindly ignore the logic of Marxism can believe that 'sexual anarchy' is a by-product of the socialist revolution of the working class, whereas it is embedded in the psyche and everyday practice of the bourgeoisie.[252]

Thus, for EMS, monogamy alone would not suffice; man-woman relationships had to be directed towards revolutionary ends. EMS believed that the moralities of society were rooted mainly in class. The morality formed on these lines works in favour of the dominant. Such asymmetrical codes of morality would, sooner or later, force the oppressed to rise against the dominant. The rise of the oppressed will not only resolve class contradictions but will work towards the idea of humanity, which will fashion a new morality or ethics. The ethics and moralities of EMS's communist self can be seen in his ideas about the moral conduct and duties of the working class. EMS identified the features of the 'new moral consciousness' that was emerging within the new generation of a working-class population of Kerala (and India):

> This new socialist generation rejects sexual anarchy… Rather than indulge in any beastly courtship that only serves to satisfy one's primal urges in sexual life, they seek a marriage union that enables them to appreciate and elevate their personal lives. Rather than lust emerging from beauty, their marriage is based on the love that results from the mutual dependence and cooperation between men and women inclined to and capable of supporting each other in all

[250]Namboodiripad, 290.
[251]Namboodiripad, 288. Jeeval Sahitya Sangham, founded in 1937, was a literary movement which espoused revolutionary ideas in literature. EMS was one of its advocates. The movement sparked a debate in Malayalam public sphere between the votaries of freedom of expression and those who wanted to utilise literature as a means of social change. The Sangham became Progressive Writers' Association formed in 1938 and EMS had drafted its founding document.
[252]Namboodiripad, 288.

aspects of life. Above all, even their sexual life is subordinate to the *labour* (my emphasis) for realising a glorious, new world.[253]

In short, the working class has the power to determine the social decline of the bourgeoisie and hence, also check sexual anarchy by introducing new moral discipline. Here, we can identify the working of an 'ascetic modality', a concept articulated by Rajarshi Dasgupta that describes the features of left subjectivity intrinsic to the process of becoming a communist in the early-twentieth century. Dasgupta argues that to be a communist, one must begin with a physical interpellation, working through sensory perception. The first aspect was to conduct, control and discipline the body and make it a stable abode or an archive of a very different class. Changing the principles of the embodied self meant that one had to establish firm control over desire, isolate one's self from physical sensation and voluntarily retain a sequestered mind. What then becomes extremely important for managing desire is producing a secular topography of the communist mind, which is agreeable to one's techniques of styling and available to the analytical gaze of self-criticism.[254] The human subject is often formed and reflected through the body. Consciousness beyond the body is created through discursive practices and discipline. Reflections of bodily experiences and symbolic bodies constitute a subject as being in the world.

We can see EMS's recognition of this imperative for disciplining the self as central to the making of a communist self. EMS cites how Soviet society, the par exemplar of socialism, followed a principle of ethics and morality of utmost 'military-like' discipline. According to EMS, any person who cannot follow this principle will find it difficult to fight the morality of the feudal and bourgeoise social setup.[255] Thus, EMS put forward a set of precepts for an ethical life, an ascetic modality that covers all aspects of life, including sexuality, that refashions the affect, body, and consciousness. Here, it is helpful to consider EMS's enumeration of the 'qualities of a good politician': 1. Honesty and civility (*maryada*); 2. Closeness with people and the readiness to serve them; 3. Dissemination of knowledge related to politics.[256] Although he is talking in abstract

[253]Namboodiripad, 289–90.
[254]Dasgupta, 'The Ascetic Modality', 75–79.
[255]Namboodiripad, 'Marxisavum Saanmaargikabodhavum', 296.
[256]'Video, Comrade EMS Namboothiripad, Kerala, India', IndiaVideo, accessed 1 March 2022,

terms of a 'politician', we can see that the third quality identified by EMS relates to propagating a particular brand of political knowledge that instils critical revolutionary consciousness in people. EMS believed that any person working to destroy the bourgeois social system and build a socialist order imbibes the language of critique of the social system, economy, politics, and even bourgeois aesthetics. They should also know and be aware of socialist ethics and morality.[257]

We also must look at EMS's idea of ethics which was central to his understanding of the communist self. EMS believed that 'ethics' works as a mirror of class contradictions and a tool of the class struggle. Here, ethical rules went beyond the exclusive domain of sexuality discussed earlier. He believed that Sastric injunctions like Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara (speak the truth, lead righteous life), and the Ten Commandments of Christianity would undergo changes in history.[258] EMS considered that, as in the case of the sexual life of human beings, changes in the morality of human nature were likely to happen, covering all other spheres of life. One of the interventions of EMS in the public sphere was cultivating and expanding working-class ethics as a discourse. As he arrives at this idea of working-class ethics, EMS's idea of justice was shaped along with these principles by primarily identifying the mechanism of power that was dominated by the social hierarchies of caste and political hierarchies dictated by colonialism. These skewed hierarchies had to be offset by new communist ethics of the self: only that would usher in a new sense of politics and equality.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to map EMS Namboodiripad's engagements with respect to the 'political' and 'public', which accounted for the moulding of the self over the intellectual/ ideological sojourns and departures he undertakes. The political can be seen as operating with respect to the subject formation of EMS as a political persona, be it as a reformer of the Namboothiri community, Gandhian, Congress socialist, and Marxist. While looking at the intellectual topography of EMS, this chapter primarily looked at and saw the categories he used for understanding one's being in the world

http://www.indiavideo.org/kerala/travel/ems-namboothiripad-comrade-2961.php.
[257]Namboodiripad, 'Marxisavum Saanmaargikabodhavum', 294–95.
[258]Namboodiripad, 92.

and experiencing it. EMS attempted to free himself from the pre-modern inheritances of the community and imbibed the modern. The pre-modern at the level of the person was mapped through his childhood, and a humanistic understanding of the individuated self was cultivated in the course of his desubjectivation from the Namboothiri self. A basic idea of 'revolution' — the total transformation of society — he gathers as a young Namboothiri propels him to Gandhian and the national struggle for freedom. While he departs from the Gandhian modes of public action, the ideal of revolutionary socio-political transformation abides and leads him toward the left ideological spectrum. And EMS arrives at the notion of class as an analytical category for understanding the world and ushering in change and 'progress'. In this process, the disciplining of the self remains constant, and aspects of the disciplining get woven into his intellectual shifts. The structural retentions are carried forward from one framework to the other.

The modern self gets articulated between the rejections one makes, influences one retains and the incomplete beginnings embodied in the enunciations about 'what ought to be'. It is not merely the given identity of being born as a Brahmin that binds EMS Namboodiripad to the broader ideological vantage points towards becoming a Gandhian, a Socialist and a Marxist. The frameworks that constitute the self, the quests and the rejections accounted for the transitions that bound him to the ideological systems EMS chose at different points in his evolution as a highly public persona. The rules laid down by the Dharmasastras were replaced by a new set of rules which was modern.

As we will see in the next chapter, the cultural inheritances of EMS Namboodiripad from his community showed intense shades of an 'Indian self' mixing up with western notions of rationality. The Namboothiri public sphere that EMS inherits imparts a distinct sense of time, being and self. What EMS achieved through his intellectual departures was a perturbing of the self that moved away from the religious realm and kept redefining its cultural inheritances. EMS's idea of justice was more or less rooted in the idea of becoming a universal human being. His privileged position in the domains EMS engaged in made this possible. EMS' critical lenses were categorised, and the historical legacy left behind by the public is selective and layered. Thus, this

opens up further questions on the positioning of a twentieth-century intellectual in a particular ‘secular’ Indian space.

Chapter II.

LOOKING INWARD: EMERGENCE OF NAMBOOTHIRI PRINT PUBLIC AND THE POLITICS OF TIME

In the first chapter, we saw how EMS Namboodiripad considered political engagements as essential for locating oneself as modern in the changing spaces of the 'public'. This chapter intends to contextualise the inherited public of EMS by mapping the nature of the upper caste – specifically Namboothiri - print public of early-twentieth-century Kerala. This exercise will illuminate the agential role rendered by the 'modern' that seeped into the extant and inherited norms in EMS's intellectual worlds during his early phases of public life. It will also elucidate the modalities through which the modern worked in the intellectual and his inheritances. The moral and ethical sources of the modern were influenced by the processes that constituted a new sense of 'public'.

A distinct 'politics of time'[1] emerging from the contingencies of colonial modernity marked the early-twentieth-century Malayalam print public. The 'colonial modern' induced the Namboothiri Brahmin community to look inwards and examine its pasts by constructing the two categories of the modern and non-modern, both within the community and in relation to other caste communities. Confronted with the vagaries of modernity that perturbed their position in caste society, Namboothiri Brahmins inevitably attempted to script histories of their own to cope with the unitary progressing time of modernity.[2] Caste thus played an essential role in the call for mobility for the community, expressed in temporal terms, for maintaining their dominance in the unfolding modern socio-political environment. The Namboothiri publics in the early-twentieth century as a space contributed to the articulation and experience of linear time within the community. EMS was initiated into this temporality before he was introduced to Marxist temporal frameworks. I argue that the linear temporality introduced through the Namboothiri publics enhanced EMS's adaptation to new ideologies like Marxism with their distinct politics of time. Thus, the modern male

[1]Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: 'Primitives' and History-Writing in a Colonial Society*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[2]Banerjee, 14.

Brahmin subjectivity was being reconfigured through inversions and the processes of negotiating time zones that simultaneously defined the pre-colonial and the colonial.

Following the introduction, the chapter examines the transition of meanings of 'public' over time. It then maps the contours of the elite print public by discussing the new trends brought about by the print public and how the elites envisaged this public. The chapter then narrows down to the Namboothiri print public. It considers aspects of the new imaginary of the public among Namboothiris constituted by Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha and its entry into the print sphere. The chapter shows that the Namboothiri public was characterised by a clash of temporalities engendered by analysing aspects of the debates on modern education. The chapter then places the history writing projects of Namboothiri Brahmins within the clash of temporalities. It discusses the spatio-temporal implications of the Brahminical project of history before offering conclusions.

Pre-modern to Modern Publics

An account of the historical processes that trace the evolution of the 'crowd' into a 'public' and a critical public sphere in Kerala is an ongoing process. In making critical public spheres in Kerala, the imaginary spaces that originated around caste and community associations were an important strand.[3] Public cultures of the early twentieth century Kerala and their specificities can be studied along with the evolution of the political subject in the public sphere. Understanding the formation of the new political domains and imaginaries in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Kerala offers a way of looking at the histories of modernity and its many manifestations. One of the features/ attributes of the modern world is the formation of a representative' public', and this aspect needs to be contextualised and historicised as a

[3]Cultural variants of religious traditions in the early-nineteenth century Kerala meant, the translation of Bible into Malayalam. Missionary activities and the forming of a religious public that has a cultural variant is an important aspect in Travancore and in Malabar. Where, the uneducated and lower castes formed a public as a consequence of the missionary activities. This is only one instance of the point alluded to. See, G. Arunima, 'Imagining Communities–Differently: Print, Language and the (Public Sphere) in Colonial Kerala', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*43, no. 1 (1 March 2006): 63–76.

variant of modernity in South Asian societies to understand the genealogy of modern democracies.

The modern sense of a critical public was yet to emerge in early-nineteenth-century Kerala. Studying this process in the context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Kerala becomes significant for the multiplicity of meanings gained in forming a new domain that can be identified as public.[4] The new domain advanced with the coming of the printing press. Until then, the imaginary public was confined and restrained to gatherings at the local markets, temple festivals, royal rituals like annual processions or public punishment spectacles administered by the sovereign.

The political systems that worked in pre-modern Kerala did not have much stake in the public. The 'practice of reason' in pre-modern Kerala belonged to a knowledge system different from modern Europe's. The modern public sphere in Western Europe emerged as an imaginary that mediated between state and society.[5] In the Indian context, especially in the medieval times, in Kerala, the meaning of 'public' was not an entity that mediated between the local monarchs and society; instead, it was only a crowd, subjects in the making, controlled and governed by the regional and local monarchs and powerful royal households called *swaroopams*.[6] The power of the *naduvazhis* and *swaroopams* were imposed on a duteous public.[7] At the local level, social imaginaries were formed around *kudis, kaavus and tharas* around which gatherings happened and became public.[8] Similarly, the temples and markets also constituted the public in medieval south India.[9] The temples in Kerala were sites of

[4] The periodisation of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a threshold of the coming of modern can be contested. This chapter do not get into the debates of early modern.
[5]Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, 1st ed. (MIT Press, 1989).
[6]M R Raghava Varier, *Madhyakalakeralam: Swaroopaneethiyude Charithrapaatangal*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 2015); M R Raghava Varier, 'State as Svarūpam : An Introductory Essay', in *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, ed. R Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat, and T R Venugopalan, 1st ed. (Thrissur, 2002).
[7]Naduvazhis were the governors assigned by the Perumals in the local provinces whereas *swaroopams* were powerful ruling houses who were landlords who ruled the *nadus*.
[8]K N Ganesh, *Malayaliyude Desakalangal*, 1st ed. (Calicut: Raspberry Books, 2018), 21.
[9]Kesavan Veluthat, 'The Temple and the State: Religion and Politics in Early Medieval South India', in *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, ed. R Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat, and T R Venugopalan, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Cosmo Books, 2002).

debates and discussions on religion and ritual practices that resulted in the formation of temple publics preceding the modern public.[10]

Apart from the publics controlled by local dynasties and caste-divided temple publics, markets were the places of interaction and an arena of cultural exchange.[11] Bayly has argued in the case of North India that markets in coastal cities characterised by trade and commerce were the public, and the nature of the public discussions was mainly surrounded by the trading centres.[12] The expansion of a public outside the trading centres happened only with the printing press and developments in the realm of language. For instance, G Arunima looks at the career of The Bible, its claims and contestations in nineteenth-century Kerala's public sphere. Language reform through missionary efforts was encouraged in this period.[13]

The Brahmin community public had been shaped along with the various learning centres and temples in Kerala.[14] Subsequently, newspapers and journals began articulating the community's 'public interest' in the early twentieth century. Namboothiri Brahmins took up community affairs as a matter of 'public concern', which was an unthinkable prospect in the older order. This was made possible only because the meanings and possibilities of the notion of 'public' had begun to change. By the end of the nineteenth century, the public sphere had undoubtedly emerged as the space in which new forces contended with established socio-cultural and political forces for

[10]Veluthat; Roopesh O B looks at temple publics as a site of contestations in the post-colonial era, and engages with the notion of temple publics of the early-twentieth century Kerala. See Roopesh O B, 'Temple as the Political Arena in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 16 (2017): 12–15.
[11] Janaki Nair gives a glimpse of the nature of the state that was evolving from the pre-modern to modern and sees how a notion of publicness was taking shape: Janaki Nair, 'Modernity and "Publicness": The Career of the Mysore Matha, 1880–1940', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 57, no. 1 (1 January 2020): 5–29. To look at the pre-modern sense of spatialities., in the southern part of India, i.e, the Tamil-speaking regions, social formations are identified in two periods namely pastoral agricultural and plough agricultural. The periods witnessed linguistic and cultural progress in the ancient south. See Rajan Gurukkal, 'Writing, Literacy, and Social Formations in the Tamil South', in *Social Formations of Early South India*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[12]C A Bayly, 'Indian Capital and the Emergence of Colonial Society', in *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45–78.
[13]Arunima, 'Imagining Communities–Differently', 1 March 2006.
[14]Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, 1st ed. (Calicut: Sandhya Publications, 1978); M G S Narayanan, *Perumāḷs of Kerala : Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy : Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cēra Perumāḷs of Makōtai (c. AD 800-AD 1124)* (Thrissur: Cosmo Books, 2013).

hegemony.[15] Counter publics and resistance against the domination of caste elites in the public sphere were witnessed from late-nineteenth to twentieth-century Kerala. An instance of the subaltern use of and assertion in this public is their plea for representation in the government services over and above a 'Malayali' identity.[16] People had begun to lose the fear of being touched in the crowds. The crowd thus presented the potential for the experience of equality. The taboos of caste began to be addressed initially through the public, and the density of the crowds opened up possibilities for shedding caste in a crowd. The public and crowd thus assumed the subversive meanings and potentials.

The public emerging in Kerala during the early-twentieth century had a modern relationship with the people as a new demographic category in which numbers were a crucial component. One can argue that the public use of critical reason was pivotal in this expansion process. The public use of reason that came with the Eurocentric notions of modernity provided for the making of a 'political public'. As much as a shared sense of public was evolving over a common linguistic identity, there were also caste, gender, and spatial divisions. From the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the very idea of the public was closely associated with social reform movements and the community publics. Though the much celebrated 'Kerala renaissance' was influenced by Eurocentric rationality, public interventionists were also influenced by the vernacular thinking traditions and logic different from Europe's.

Kerala's print culture has a history from the 1840's first with the emergence of magazines and, later, newspapers by the end of the nineteenth century. *Rajyasamachram* and *Njanankshepam* were the oldest newspapers of Kerala. Later papers like *Pashchimodayam* and *Vidyasamgraham* gave importance to religion-Christianity.[17] By the early-twentieth century, the reading public that emerged through magazines, novels, and newspapers was limited mainly to society's elite sections. The

[15] As an extension of this Raghavan narrates about the caste publics from Vaikom and Savarnajathas in the 1930s. See Puthupally Raghavan, *Viplavasmaranakal*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, 2009), 66.
[16]This was also reflected in Shanar rebellions in the south. See P Govindapillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Nalam Sanchika Madhyamaparvam*, 2nd ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2013), 61.
[17]Govindapillai, 61.

nature of concerns raised in the early-twentieth century newspapers was against the corruption of officials of the state, especially the non-Malayali Brahmins.[18] By then, discussions in the newspapers had slowly shifted from religion to community, literature, gender, caste, and aspects related to land and property. The question of 'what ought to be' became frequently expressed in magazines and newspapers.[19] These shifts were indicative of the various societal transformations of the time. Many of these articulations were primarily influenced by the knowledge emerging from the West. For instance, if we look at the early twentieth-century magazines, one could see discussions related to Western literature and culture as a desirable reference point. A sense of conscious and worldly informed public had already emerged by the early-twentieth century.

In India, an intellectual in its modern sense is a person who raised concern over social justice and was involved in philosophical questioning and social action.[20] In the earlier phases of print culture, reform movements and the question of the social were more dominant than aspects of nationalism. Nationalism began to be increasingly articulated only later in the early-twentieth-century Malayalam print public. The question of society that was being thought afresh through the lens of the modern remained the core concern of intellectuals in early-twentieth-century Kerala. The moves made by intellectuals and public interventionists become significant in recording the silences and voices in the history of twentieth-century Kerala. By the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the reading public in Kerala expanded so much that community organisations and associations started inventing themselves through the printed word. The period also marked the epistemological shifts that influenced the masses, reflected in the community associations. Thinkers like Sree Narayana Guru influenced interventionists like Kumaran Asan and Dr Palpu.

[18]Kumar, 'The Public, the State and New Domains of Writing'; Govindapillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Nalam Sanchika Madhyamaparvam*.
[19]Sruthi Vinayan and Merin Simi Raj, 'The Politics of Representation and the "Ideal Malayalee Woman": Remembering Malayalam Women's Magazines of the Early 20th-Century Kerala, South India', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*55, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 399–411.
[20]Romila Thapar, 'Searching for the Public Intellectual', *Seminar*, no. 665 (January 2015).

An essential aspect of the printing press and language in Kerala is how caste got translated into everyday life and shaped new forms through the institutional processes unfolding in Kerala. Existing systems of the vernacular and cultural aspects of the local that found expression through the printed word in the early-twentieth century saw caste as an essential factor. Thus, communities had begun to articulate themselves in the emerging print public. Moreover, the narratives that looked 'inwards' shaped and defined the public as an imaginary, represented primarily by the upper castes. Apart from the printing press becoming a mode of representation of the caste elites, the cultural aspects of modernity straight-jacketed extant, regional, oral traditions along the lines of western rationality. This is an instance of the functioning of modernity in colonial societies. The mediations of the English-educated elite mirrored epistemological interventions and ontological quests rooted in western scientific rationality. Colonial modernity often performed as a double-edged weapon that, on the one hand, offered a new language in institutional forms and, on the other, instated Eurocentric notions.

Regions also began to be marked through the print public. The printing press and the emerging literary public found expressions of the vernacular and the local and strengthened notions of geography through the written word. People began to record and identify with places, as regions were marked through the written word. The public domain unfolding in the colonial Malabar and the princely states of Cochin and Travancore varied with these regions' socio-political developments. At the same time, broader geographical imaginations that went beyond regions were also expressed in the print public. Some examples include sub-national and national imaginations such as Keralam/ Malayalam and India/ Bharatham, as well as specific caste geographies such as *Parasuramakshetram* (the domain of Parasurama) of Malayala Brahmins and Aryan geographies.

The emergence of the political subject along the contours of the modern public is an essential aspect of enquiry.[21] Expressions of politics were primarily found in the

[21]To narrow down to the sphere of politics engaged by EMS one is to look at the act of reading as transgressive of existing social conventions and the political. In the previous chapter we looked at the wide philosophical canvass of different meanings of politics. Here, one is to look at how Samaddar articulates the idea of political subject. Samaddar looks at the situations that outlines about the conditions surrounding the emergence of the political subject. He sees 'politics as discourse of actions'

public sphere of the time. Politics began to be synonymously associated with the public. However, the public-private rift was there from the beginning, reflected in the writings that appeared in the early-twentieth century magazines. The preconditions of becoming a political subject in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth and its relation to modernity will add to the corpus of scholarly literature on Keralam.

Mapping the Elite Print Public

The emergence of a print public and the corresponding development of literary genres like novels, essays, short stories, and journalism were relatively late in Kerala compared to other regions and languages in India.[22] The English newspaper *Western Star* and Malayalam newspaper *Paschima Tharaka* published by Premji Bheemji Devji,[23] can be considered one of the earliest publications that accommodated the discourse of the modern secular public sphere in Kerala.[24] An estimate from 1904 records about fifty Malayalam magazines and newspapers.[25] By the 1930s, there were more than thirty-five Malayalam magazines alone.[26] Taking two Malayalam magazines, viz *Rasikaranjini* and *Vidyavinodini,* as examples, this section will attempt to identify the contours of the elite print public of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Rasikaranjini was a literary magazine started by one of Malayalam's foremost littérateur-poet Ramavarma Appan Thampuran, in 1902, under the editorship of another literary stalwart Kodungaloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran.[27] Although the magazine ended its publication in 1907 due to financial constraints, Rasikaranjini offered

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and looks at how politics creates its subject, the subject who is not the slave of a politics guided by others, but who authors politics. He sees that it is the contentious conditions of politics that allow the emergence of the political subject. Emergence of the political subject in the 19th and early 20th century was a mix of dissenting voices articulating themselves. See Ranabir Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010).

[22]Govindapillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Nalam Sanchika Madhyamaparvam*.

[23] Premji Devji Bheemji was a Gujarati businessman based in Cochin in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. He spoke Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, and English. Bheemji established a press in Cochin. Others who were involved in the printing business couldn't compete with Bheemji in the late nineteenth century.

[24]Govindapillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Nalam Sanchika Madhyamaparvam*, 60.

[25]Choondayil C Raghavapothuval, 'Malayala Pathrangalum Maasikakalum', *Rasikaranjini* 2, no. 3 (Thulam 1903): 179.

[26]G Priyadarsanan, *Adyakaala Maasikakal*, 1st ed. (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 2007).

[27]M Jayaraj, *Malayala Achadi Madhyamam: Bhoothavum Varthamanavum*, 1st ed. (Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books, 2013), 94.

platforms for many contemporary writers and poets in its time.[28] One of the oldest literary works of Malayalam, *Unnueeli Sandesham,* was first published in *Rasikaranjini*. *Vidyavinodini*, considered Malayalam's second literary magazine, was started in 1899 by literary critic CP Achuthamenon.[29] Although it began as a literary magazine, the periodical featured other topics, including science. *Vidyavinodini* lived longer than *Rasikaranjini*, publishing for about twelve years and offering the platform for many writers and poets of the time. A survey of these magazines shows several discussions reflecting the widespread social changes occurring in the period. At the heart of these intellectual deliberations were the questions of *parishkaram*[30] and 'tradition'. We see elites in the process of recognising and reflecting on the new print space and its multiple possibilities. The following subsections will highlight aspects of these discussions.

The New Print Public: Trends and Potentialities

By the early-twentieth century, new trends were becoming visible in Malayalam print public sphere. For instance, on its third anniversary of publication in 1904, *Rasikaranjini* issued a notice addressing prospective contributors, especially the students and literary enthusiasts:

> Themes should be dealt with carefully and addressed in complete depth. Do not let the true meaning go off for the sound and noise you want to hear; an essay should have depth and meaning that should move people.[31]

We see here an indication of the shift in literary sensibilities, in terms of content over form, ideas and meanings over linguistic embellishments such as alliterations and rigid rules of style prevalent in the literary culture of the time. *Ranjini's* move to reward the contributors of essays also signals another aspect of the shift in given sensibilities of writing and reading. The act of rewarding writers shows the basic tendencies of print capitalism. The practice of paying writers offered opportunities to amateur writers,

[28]Jayaraj, 94–95.
[29]Jayaraj, 91.
[30]The term *parishkaram* literally means 'reform'. The term was used in varied ways in early-twentieth century Malayalam print public sphere to connote 'urbanization' and 'civilisation'. It became a term to describe the changes associated with modernization. See K C Manavikraman Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 7 (Idavam 1909): 257–62; K M, 'Namboothirimaarude Chila Ulkrishta Gunangal', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 8 (Mithunam 1909): 283–92.
[31]'Prasthaavana', *Rasikaranjini* 3, no. 1 (Chingam 1904): 3.

although they remained overwhelmingly higher caste. This practice encouraged essays featuring modern ideas. Considering that this was earlier done only by established writers often belonging to various royal houses in Kerala and adhering to rigid conventions of grammar and style, we see the discourse on language getting opened up to a broader section of the society through such journals. On its first anniversary, *Ranjini* urged people to take it upon themselves to contribute to the Malayalam language and literature:

> With the passage of royal poet-littérateurs such as Maharaja Aditya Varma, Sakthan Thampuran, Samoothiri… Thampuran, Kadathinaatu Thampuran… the *aksharalaksham* phase of Malayalam is over. The responsibility of nourishing the *mathrubhumi* (motherland) with unity of purpose is now vested in the *naatukaar* (common people).[32]

However, a literary career was not much favoured and even resisted among the middle-class caste elites in the early-twentieth century. Perhaps addressing this resistance, *Rasikaranjini* presented a literary career as a perfectly respectable profession akin to government service or legal or medical practice; that there is no shame in being rewarded for essays.[33] However, this approach continued for many decades. For instance, in his autobiography, *Jeevitha Smaranakal*, the Malayalam writer EV Krishna Pillai mentions his father's intense and continued dislike of his literary pursuits. Pillai's lawyer father, who reportedly lacked the interest or knowledge to appreciate his son's literary talent, considered it a stumbling block to Pillai's possible career in law or government service. To his father, even the money he earned from writing – an amount like the one thousand rupees royalty Pillai had received for a book in 1925 – was dishonourable and shameful.[34] Malayalam journals sought to change this attitude by encouraging aspiring writers to participate in the Malayalam print sphere actively. Another possible reason for the reluctance to become a writer seemed to have been the tendency of authorities to discourage young, educated individuals from commenting on government policies, as Palliyil Gopala Menon observed in his editorial in the 1902 issue of *Vidyavinodini*. Apparently, 'BA graduates' had earned notoriety for being troublemakers. At the same time, Menon observed that the prospect of seeing

[32]'Prasthaavana', *Rasikaranjini* 2, no. 1 (Chingam 1903): 3.
[33]'Prasthaavana', 3.
[34]E V Krishna Pillai, *Jeevitha Smaranakal*, 1st ed. (Kollam: Rachana Books, 2010), 259–60.

their names printed in magazines also spawned many writers, often churning out 'substandard' articles.[35]

Writers also began to introduce modern ways of intellection to readers. For example, A Narayana Pothuval listed the tenets of the 'scientific' mode of thinking in his essay on the history of journalism appearing in 1904 in *Rasikaranjini*. According to Pothuval, every conceivable phenomenon obeys specific general laws, and these laws and principles can be known from experience. One must compare experiences across space and time to deduce these principles. Furthermore, these principles must, in turn, be subject to reason for them to become generalisable. For Pothuval, history was an essential tool required for the deduction of general laws.[36]

The interlocutors of the new print public also reflected on the moral functions of the new print public. Writers such as Raghava Pothuval argued that the print public must aim towards the moral refinement of people rather than performing the mere reporting of everyday, mundane events. According to him, Malayalam periodicals must imitate English publications and writers such as Swift and Goldsmith, who, through their satire and other piercing writings, transformed the deplorable character traits of English people.[37] Commentators also noted that avenues of modernity such as education enable one to achieve enlightenment and refinement by accessing the collective human wisdom embodied in literature and history.[38] If the sages of the past had attained enlightenment by retreating from society, in modern society (*parishkritha samooham*), one could achieve the same by being part of the society through education; if enlightenment had been the prerogative of a privileged few, it is accessible to all in modern times. Pillai suggested four methods of *parishkaranam* such as *swabhava parishkaranam* (character refinement), language proficiency, knowledge acquisition and bolstering of the powers of imagination.

[35]Palliyil Gopalamenon, 'Vidyavinodini Lekhanangal', *Vidyavinodini* 12, no. 12 (Kanni 1901): 482–83.
[36]A Narayanapothuval, 'Pathracharithram', *Rasikaranjini* 2, no. 4 (Vrishchikam 1903): 229.
[37]Raghavapothuval, 'Malayala Pathrangalum Maasikakalum', 185.
[38]K Paramupillai, 'Maanushaparishkaranam', *Rasikaranjini* 2, no. 4 (Vrishchikam 1903): 203.

Character refinement, the ultimate aim of education, was to be achieved by gaining an understanding of human nature embodied in history and literature.[39] Thus one acquires an assortment of qualities such as comprehension, sympathy, compassion, affection, independent thinking, harmony, humility, honesty, sincerity, courage, politeness, and moderation, to mention a few.[40] While learning classical languages like Latin, Greek, Hindustani, or Sanskrit can give insights into human nature, proficiency in English can help one navigate the modern world.[41] Pillai compares knowledge to a treasure trove embedded in both *naveena* (new/ modern) and *pracheena* (old/ traditional) texts. A student must adapt this array of knowledge to the needs of the time, gaining its essence by striking a balance between specialist knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge.[42] Fourthly, one must reinforce creativity and imagination, which is essential to the modern self and have made possible innovations like the telegraph, railways, and electricity.[43] Thus essential to *swabhava parishkaranam* is the act of reading and learning, reflexivity, and intellection.

A repeated theme in these magazines was the history of print and journalism. Writings on print history indicate the reflexivity of these interlocutors on the nature of the new spaces of intellection that were opening up and the possibilities they offered. The production of newspapers was a complex, ostensibly modern activity involving machines. For example, A Narayana Pothuval contrasted the production of newspapers to craftwork:

> The newspaper business is not mere handiwork but is a complex operation where sheets of paper of a few inches are printed, folded, and cut into 2500 copies in an hour by machines.[44]

Writing a history of the print was done for the new reading public of the early-twentieth century; this was done to show the power of print modernity and what newspapers and journals could do as a mode of intervention in the emerging public sphere across communities and regions. Narrating the history of print and newspapers

[39]Paramupillai, 202–3.
[40]Paramupillai, 201.
[41]Paramupillai, 204–5; K Paramupillai, 'Maanushaparishkaranam', *Rasikaranjini* 2, no. 5 (Dhanu 1903): 278.
[42]Paramupillai, 'Maanushaparishkaranam', Dhanu 1903, 278–80.
[43]Paramupillai, 280.
[44]Narayanapothuval, 'Pathracharithram', 231–32.

from Europe can be seen as an act of setting the discourse by the elite castes to encourage their counterparts to venture into the printing world and actively engage with/ in it in the early twentieth century.

More importantly, the new print public sphere opened up novel arenas for intervention in the newly constituted domains of 'social' and 'political'. We see the emergence of the category of 'common people' and 'public' in the writings of the time, especially the accounts of the history of print and journalism. These narratives had Western European experience as their reference point, especially for the critical role newspapers played in making their governments accountable.[45] According to these histories, newspapers began as mouthpieces of governments but gradually developed a critical relationship with them when they criticised government policies and argued for reforms. This resulted in various forms of sanction on newspapers, but the role of editors became crucial at that juncture. The editors of different newspapers who experienced censure and imprisonment endured patiently to represent the voices of 'common people'.[46] Narayana Pothuval provided a summary of newspapers in India which waged similar struggles against the British government, which attempted to subdue critical voices.[47] Here we see the imagining of a distinct space of the 'common' and 'public'.

Though Narayana Pothuval was doubtful of the prospects for similar newspapers in Kerala, he reflected on the possibility for Malayalam readers to have editors like in England who had the power to criticise the governments and write the story of the 'common people'.[48] However, for Chundayil C Raghavapothuval, another historian of journalism in *Rasikaranjini*, newspapers had brought about significant changes in the intellectual and social life of Malayalis for over a century.[49] Pothuval uses several terms to depict this qualitative change in Kerala - *parishkaram* (reform), *parishkara abhivridhi* (prosperity through reform), *prakrithi bhedam* (change in nature). This qualitative

[45]Raghavapothuval, 'Malayala Pathrangalum Maasikakalum', 185; Narayanapothuval, 'Pathracharithram', 229.
[46]Raghavapothuval, 'Malayala Pathrangalum Maasikakalum', 178; Narayanapothuval, 'Pathracharithram', 230.
[47]Narayanapothuval, 'Pathracharithram', 231–32.
[48]Narayanapothuval, 231.
[49]Raghavapothuval, 'Malayala Pathrangalum Maasikakalum', 176–77.

change was attributed to the many newspapers and magazines started by patriotic Malayalees over the last thirty years after the example of their British counterparts, although many of them were short-lived.[50] The European experience offered models for print capitalism in the Malayalam language.

Moreover, Malayalam newspapers fared behind English publications. English newspapers and periodicals published in Europe and India were notable for factual accuracy and diversified into niche areas such as natural science and religion; they also contributed to the reform of the English language.[51] Compared to their English counterparts, Raghava Pothuval described the sorry state of Malayalam newspapers:

> Many use newspapers to carry sugar and other groceries. Some subscribe to newspapers to please editors and managers but use the sheets to wrap their children's books. Many others buy newspapers as a marker of status, but they lie unread in a corner of the house. What might be the reasons for this behaviour? Readers cannot be blamed for neglecting newspapers when they turn the pages for the first few times and see nothing worthwhile printed. Some editors fill out space with utter garbage. Some editors unjustly rubbish people and governments and invite legal and other troubles. Some journalists use newspapers to please government officials and waste precious space. In some cases, advertisements occupy three of the total four pages. It is the good fortune of readers to find something worthwhile in newspapers amidst all this.[52]

The emerging print modernity shaped a new intellectual class in the early twentieth century Keralam. Facilitated through the print world, the new class of intellectuals marked the transitions from a worldview corresponding to the sovereign/monarchical socio-political order to that of a modern subjecthood. These transitions redesigned the forms of power based on language and print, mediated by the publishing houses to question the imperial power and the local monarchs. The new category of the 'common people' that emerged through these interlocutions provided one vantage point for the intellectual interventions in the new print public sphere. History writing during this period was primarily hagiographic narratives or vague stories about pasts without evidence and logic. Journals like *Rasikaranjini* addressed questions

[50]Raghavapothuval, 179.
[51]Raghavapothuval, 180.
[52]Raghavapothuval, 181–82.

on language and people and not merely on gods and kings. Real-life experiences and thoughts/ideas were beginning to find their place in the print world. This was made possible through the public use of reason that the essayists practised.

A 1901 article on the history of the printing press in Kerala that appeared in *Vidyavinodini* argued that the diverse and increasing number of publications in the Malayalam print world has significantly altered people's awareness of the world qualitatively different way than conventional modes of knowledge acquisition.[53] It has reduced the distances between territories separated by thousands of miles and has familiarised its culture, polity and society with Malayalees as if they were their neighbours.[54] By this time, literary publics played a part in bringing together Malayalees in places outside Kerala, such as Madras and thus the rallying of Malayali identity.[55] Even as the emerging educated public imagined a Malayali identity, this was not a homogenous one. This is exemplified by the *Vidyavinodini* article's (mentioned above) discussion of the salience of printing technology with respect to community and religion.[56] It begins with a discussion on the size of the literate population by religion. Of the sixty lakh total population in Kerala, forty lakh were Hindus, and the author identifies that only five lakh were literate - constituted mainly by Hindus and a smattering of Christians.[57]

The article also identifies the Ramayanam Kilipattu by Thunchath Ezhuthachan, the father of the Malayalam language, as the most printed text in Malayalam.[58] It estimates that about six thousand copies of Ramayanam are published annually by various publishers. Given the forty years of publication of the text, at least one lakh copies (if not double the number) of the book were in circulation in Kerala, even in poorer households.[59] Citing these statistics, the author claims that Ramayanam was singularly responsible for the musical and literary proficiency and *eeshwaravicharam*

[53]'Achadiyanthram', *Vidyavinodini* 10, no. 8 (Idavam 1901): 335.
[54]'Achadiyanthram', 335.
[55]Keralavarma Valiyakoyithampuran, 'Oru Malayala Samajam', *Rasikaranjini* 3, no. 10 (Idavam 1905): 515–20.
[56]'Achadiyanthram', 335.
[57]'Achadiyanthram', 334.
[58]'Achadiyanthram', 334.
[59]'Achadiyanthram', 334.

(i.e. consciousness of/about God, faith) of the poor across castes.[60] To support this claim, the author narrates an incident where two of his friends, during a boat journey from Ernakulam to Karupadanna, discussed the popularity of Ezhuthachan's Ramayanam Killipaatu among Malayalis. To test if this was true, they reportedly stepped out of the boat and walked into a Valan's (a lower caste group) hut to find the entire household listening to the Ramayanam recital after dinner. This discourse of the edifying effect of these 'Hindu' texts among lower castes was repeatedly referred to in the upper caste print public sphere. Thus, in the new geographies opening up through the written word, the article notes the role of ostensibly religious texts in instilling aesthetic sensibilities among the masses.

Further, in the narration of the account of print modernity exclusively through texts like Ramayanam and Mahabharatam, the author seems to be foregrounding a 'Hindu' identity.[61] The author also enlists early print history in Kerala to reinforce further the relationship between Hindus and printing, as we see here. The article recounts this history by tracing back to medieval Europe, followed by the arrival of the technology in Kerala through Portuguese colonisers.[62] Here, the author marks the significance of Christian missionaries in establishing printing presses in Kerala. In the mid-sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries set up a press in Ambazhakkad in the kingdom of Cochin, perhaps to meet the needs of the centres of learning of Portuguese, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit in Christian-dominated regions like Ankamaly.[63] Around 1577, Malayalam and Tamil alphabet was carved out for printing for the first time.[64] The article also recapitulates other instances in print history around early Catholic missionaries and presses, the setbacks faced in the form of the invasion of Tipu Sultan and subsequently, the contributions of Protestant missionaries such as Benjamin Bailey in the early-nineteenth century.[65]

[60] 'Achadiyanthram', 335.
[61] The career of Ramayanam and Mahabharatam in the print public of the early twentieth century will make an interesting study in understanding claims about religiosity, religion, and secular publics.
[62] 'Achadiyanthram', 336–37.
[63] 'Achadiyanthram', 336.
[64] 'Achadiyanthram', 336.
[65] 'Achadiyanthram', 336–38.

The article says that since the early printing presses were under the aegis of Christians, printing technology was alien to Hindus, who constituted the majority population in Kerala. And that even after Malayalam presses were established, 'our language' was still in a 'primitive' state until recently because Hindus were slow in adopting the technology. Here, even while acknowledging the contributions made by Christian missionaries to Malayalam language, the author seems to suggest that Malayalam language is a prerogative of 'Hindus'; so much so that the author states that if 'we' had undertaken the literary efforts of the present scale, Malayalam language would have attained greater heights.[66] In this appropriation of print history, a linking of the region, language and 'Hindu' identity is drawn. Such claims of community in the print public sphere were already prevalent, as Arunima discusses.[67] Thus the print public sphere, even from its early stages of inception, was a site of contestations surrounding community identities.

Namboothiri Publics

The above sections have revealed the new trends embodied in the emerging Malayalam print public sphere and how upper castes in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Kerala understood the possibilities of the new space. This understanding was part of the print public sphere that EMS Namboothiripad had inherited. This is clear from how the Namboothiri community employed the new print public sphere. But before delving into how Namboothiris utilised the new print public sphere, we will look at the existing spaces of exchanges and deliberations that can be considered a 'public', although not in the modern sense of the term. In studies of the public sphere in South Asia, the emergence of the print public sphere in the late-nineteenth century is generally seen as the watershed in the process, omitting other histories which were as much part of the process.

Pre-modern to Modern Publics

Before the oncoming of the modern Namboothiri Brahmin publics woven around community associations like Yogakshema Sabha, there were several spaces of

[66]'Achadiyanthram', 339.
[67]Arunima, 'Imagining Communities–Differently', 1 March 2006.

interaction orchestrated mostly around rituals and worship. From Namboothiri households hosting rituals and ceremonies to places of instruction to temples, these spaces primarily catered to male Brahmins. After the *upanayanam*, Namboothiri boys were usually sent to the residences of masters, where they were expected to commit one of the Vedas to memory over seven years.[68] The medium of learning was Sanskrit, and the mode of education was oral. On completion of the training, Namboothiris practised the everyday rituals they learnt through priestly duties in smaller and established temples. Once they gain experience in rituals, they enter the next phase of learning at higher-level centres of Vedic instruction called *matom*. In *matoms*, Namboothiris were trained in various levels of Vedic learning, the study of Vedic schools of thought such as *Vedanta* and *Mimamsa*, *Vedanga* disciplines such as grammar and *jyothisha* (astrology), as well as temple rituals and codes of social conduct. Usually, either affluent or exceptionally bright Namboothiris attended the *matoms*.

Of the several non-modern public and semi-public spaces of interaction and exchange, *matoms* constituted a distinct Namboothiri public. *Matoms* were usually located in the precincts of temples. Namboothiris lived in *matoms* as they acquired expertise over nearly twelve years in the assigned area of study and eventually earned the title *Bhattavrithikkaran*.[69] There were reportedly eighteen *matoms,* according to a 1906 article.[70] Sometimes, *yogams*, i.e., assemblies of Namboothiri scholars belonging to specific schools of Vedic thought, set up their *matoms*. Examples include Thrissivaperur Yogam, patronised by the royal house of Cochin and the Thirunavaya Yogam, supported by Samoothiris of Kozhikode. Both the *yogams* were engaged in mutual scholarly debates and competition. The Thirunavaya Yogam was known for its superior knowledge of astronomy. In events like the Kadavallur Anyonyam, an annual Rig Vedic debate event at Kadavallur, scholars performed Vedic recitals with rigour and phonetic accuracy and conducted debates.

Both the Yogams presented a rich line of scholars engaged in philosophical debates, contributing to the Vedic corpus.[71] Here, we see an institutional mechanism

[68]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', *Rasikaranjini* 4, no. 11 (Mithunam 1906): 595.
[69]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 597.
[70]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 596.
[71]'Thirunavayayogam', *Rasikaranjini* 3, no. 7 (Kumbham 1905): 350–51.

that nurtured a public space of debate and intellectual exchange, where Namboothiris subscribing to different schools of Vedic thought came together and engaged in scholarly discussions and deliberations. These sites worked as locally rooted, non-modern publics, although they primarily catered to elite Brahmin males. The Namboothiris also participated in Vedic recital events, competitions, examinations, and debates organised around temple ceremonies and festivals. For example, the Revathi Pattathanam competition hosted by the Samoothiris was the annual seven-day assembly of scholars at the end of which the king rewarded select scholars. Another such event is the *Murajapam* - hosted by the royals of Travancore since the eighteenth century - involving the ceremonial chanting of the Vedas by Brahmins.[72]

By the early-twentieth century, these intellectual spaces and practices were undergoing significant changes due to the widespread societal changes in Kerala. According to an early-twentieth century commentator, the traditional education of Namboothiris was on the decline, impacting the everyday life of Namboothiris. Accordingly, at the Brahmaswom Matom in Thrissivaperoor, consisting of about 100-200 Namboothiris, finding a single one who could perform even rituals like cremation was challenging.[73] The article also lamented a time when there was at least one Bhattavrithikaaran in most Namboothiri families: 'And, now we find fools who know nothing about *Sastras* becoming Bhattathiri.'[74] Not only were these spaces and practices on the decline, but they gave way to modern publics. As the new changes in modern education and broadly *parishkaram* created ripples within the community, it reverberated through the non-modern spaces as the Namboothiris discussed and debated them. For example, we see in EMS Namboodiripad's autobiography how, in his post-*upanayanam* phase, he witnessed heated debates and conversations among young Namboothiris wherever they congregated - be it at ritual events at households or temple festivals or even at Kathakali and Thullal performances.[75] Within these spaces under transformation, we see the rise of reform-oriented Namboothiris who were

[72]'Thirunavayayogam', 351.
[73]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 597–98.
[74]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 597.
[75]EMS Namboodiripad, 'Puthiya Chalanangal', in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 34–35.

instrumental in shaping modern Namboothiri publics such as community associations and print publications.

Modern Namboothiri Publics

A significant factor contributing to the emergence of the modern Namboothiri public sphere was the formation of what can be called community consciousnesses among the Namboothiris. This happened in the background of a social churning in Kerala society when established hierarchies of caste, princely authorities, and colonialism were challenged. The eruption of protest movements and assertions, especially by the hitherto subjugated castes, against caste practices such as untouchability had significantly contributed to the articulation of distinct caste communities such as 'Ezhava' and 'Pulaya' by the late-nineteenth century itself. By the early-twentieth century, these mobilisations were channelised into the formation of caste-community associations, starting with the Ezhava movement Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam 1903.

Compared to other castes, including those occupying the upper and lower tiers of caste structure, Namboothiris were relatively late in forming an association of their own: the Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha was established in 1908. The organisations became a space in themselves, where contestations around questions of *parishkaram* (reform) began to be discussed 'publicly', and this process was further facilitated through the emerging print public sphere. The condition of castes, including Malayala Brahmins, that had begun to be discussed as an issue of 'public concern' was unthinkable in the older order. In the following sections, we will analyse how the Namboothiri community identity and consciousness began to be articulated in this print public through different temporal and spatial strategies. This exercise will provide a sense of the nature of the print public that EMS inherited.

Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha was formed with the stated aim of achieving progress through modern education, reform of ritual duties and practices, and sovereignty and wealth for the Namboothiris. As we see in the document listing down the rules and regulations of the Sabha, those Namboothiris belonging to the geographical region between Kanyakumari in the south and Kanjirod river in the north

of Kerala were admitted to the association.[76] This region was further divided into seven *khandam* (pieces of land): (1) Kanyakumari to Kollam, (2) the region with KudamaloorThekkepuzha river as the northern boundary, (3) the region with AluvaVadakepuzha river on the north, (4) the region with Bharathapuzha river on the north, (5) the region with Pooraparambilpuzha river on the north, (6) the region marked by Korapuzha river in the north and (7) finally, the region between Korapuzha and Kanjirakod river.[77] We can see that this map of Namboothiris in the Sabha document coincides with the broader geographical imaginations found in Brahmin texts like *Keralolpathi*, which narrates the tale of Brahmin migration to Kerala.[78] This move sought to bring the geographically scattered Namboothiris under a single organisational umbrella.

The *upasabhakal* or sub-committees of each region would meet from time to time and discuss various topics. Some meetings were well-attended; as we see in a report from 1909, the *upasabha* at Olappamanna was attended by more than 200 members.[79] Topics discussed in the meetings included the modern and the traditional, the philosophical and the everyday and those in between. Thus, discussions about the maintenance of rituals in temples and establishing Vedic and Sanskrit schools were debated alongside questions of forming a Namboothiri bank to help impoverished community members and petitioning for the issue of birth certificates.[80] Select topics from these meetings were further discussed in the annual Sabha meetings. Although the first few meetings were held in Aluva, the border region of Cochin and Travancore, later sessions began to happen in at least thirty other locations. The Sabha worked by assigning different departments of activity, such as finance and selecting topics for discussion at annual meetings to separate wings.

The Sabha also initiated a print public sphere as we see from its working: in its *Mahayogam* - the three-day annual meeting - presided by an elected Sabha Naathan,

[76]'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabhayude Niyamangal', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 3 (Makaram 1909): 104.
[77]Ittyambarambath Brahmadathan Namboothiri, 'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabha', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1909): 26.
[78]Kesavan Veluthat, 'History and Historiography in Constituting a Region: The Case of Kerala', *Studies in People's History* 5, no. 1 (1 June 2018): 13–31.
[79]'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabhayude Upasabhakal', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 3 (Makaram 1909): 116.
[80]'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabhayude Upasabhakal', 117.

the Sabha discussed topics chosen by its working committee. These topics were based on the opinions and themes sent to the committee in writing by the larger Namboothiri public. The minutes of the meeting were further disseminated to this public through *Mangalodayam* (meaning 'new dawn'/'rebirth') magazine published by The Mangalodayam Press, established by Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha. As the Sabha's mouthpiece, *Mangalodayam* published the blueprint, guidelines and protocols of the Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha and topics related to Namboothiri life. The magazine mediated between the Namboothiris, scattered along different geographical terrains. In its first issue, the magazine stated that it sought to

> …record the *acharams* of Namboothiris and other jatis, the attendant dharmas, and the history that narrates it all, topics of domestic management, essential laws and clarifications, interesting philosophical debates as well as essays in Sanskrit, the seat of knowledge of Hindus.[81]

Mangalodayam's growth went along with the evolution of the Sabha. Although there were other Sabha publications such as *Yogakshemam* and *Unni Namboothiri*, this essay will analyse articles from the select issues of *Mangalodayam* to understand the nature of the Namboothiri public.

English-educated Namboothiris and others involved in the publication activities of the Yogakshema Sabha possessed an understanding of *parishkaram* and the methods to achieve it. In this, they looked up to the experience of Europe, as was evident in the writings that appeared in *Mangalodayam*. They were especially aware of the possibilities of the print public. For instance, an article by KC Veerarayan Raja noted the role newspapers played in kindling patriotism in cities like Calcutta.[82] Raja's article narrated the history of newspapers, starting with Venice and Florence and its passage to France, Germany and England. The article also introduced different aspects of newspapers, such as editorials, advertising, and details of printing technology. The power of newspapers was illustrated through the case where the controversial American businessman William Randolph Hearst could sway public opinion through the

[81]'Prasthavana', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1908): 3.
[82]K C Veerarayanraja, 'Varthamanapathrangal', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1910): 4.

many newspapers he owned.[83] Such articles sought to educate aspiring essayists, writers, and readers about the potential of this new space of representation. Besides, we can see in such narrations of histories from other countries and regions, *Mangalodayam* was attempting to provide models for emulation by Namboothiris.

Mangalodayam also introduced books and publications on varied topics such as education, history, and literature in its book reviews. In the review of the translation of Herbert Spencer's essay on education, *Mangalodayam* criticised the extant forms and methods of instruction and advised its readers to utilise Spencer's insights.[84] Similarly, the review of 'Kerala Charithram', a collection of articles by Kannambra Ravunni Nair that had appeared in a magazine called *Kozhikoden Manorama*, foregrounded the importance of history in the world. It also touched upon the challenges of writing Kerala history and developing the field, the importance of archiving sources such as historical documents and myths and making them available for historians. The article quoted KC Thiruveerarayan stating that 'although the book is incomplete, the project of completing the history of Kerala vests with every Keraleeyan (Keralite)'.[85] Thus, in its way, the Namboothiri print public attempted to create a reading public among Namboothiris.

At the same time, the apparently pro-modern stances of the articles that appeared in the magazine invited criticisms from the community. For example, modern education was intensely debated in the various issues of *Mangalodayam*, reflecting the broader contestation among the Namboothiris. As the debate raged on, the magazine was accused of bias in favour of modern education.[86] Addressing the concern, a 1910 editorial pointed out that it had been publishing the views of both the advocates and critics of the new educational system; that its decision to cut down or reject specific articles for 'repetition, digression from the main topic and even their unhelpful tone of animosity' was purely editorial. The editorial vowed the magazine's impartiality while clarifying that Mangalodayam had its own opinion on the question. The magazine had

[83]Veerarayanraja, 10.
[84]'Njangalude Vayanashala', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 10 (Thulam 1911): 545.
[85]'Njangalude Vayanashala', 546.
[86]'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 11 (Kanni 1910): 418–19.

only 'borne witness' to the debate and had desisted from expressing its stance.[87] The magazine also elucidated its role of representing as many diverse opinions as possible on the issue to its readers. We see here an articulation of a critical principle of journalistic freedom.

The Yogakshema Sabha had already laid out its willingness to be open to the new laws instituted in British Malabar, Cochin and Travancore in its rules and regulations.[88] 'Gone are the days of Manusmriti and Parasarasmriti and Yajnavalkyasmriti', they realised.[89] It had become inevitable for Namboothiris to be part of the new legal-rational regime, especially when land, the source of Namboothiri social power for centuries, was becoming a commodity under the new capitalist order. Discussions of the implications for Namboothiris of new laws concerning land and land relations frequently appeared in *Mangalodayam,* especially in a series called 'Janmiyum Kudiyanum' (meaning landlord and tenant). In introducing and interpreting in Malayalam, the new laws for the readers, the column familiarised them with the new regime by detailing the nuances of ownership, tenancy, inheritance, documentation, and taxation practices. In the place of the traditional understanding of eternal ownership, the new law defined *janmi/jenmi* as subject to the legal, rational transactions of the market.[90] The Sabha also represented the concerns of Namboothiris in the new order; for example, the annual meeting decided to petition all three governments in Kerala about the difficulties faced by the Namboothiris in the land record departments.[91] We see here Sabha's selective engagement with the modern state. While the Sabha expressed opposition to smallpox vaccination, it petitioned for representation in legislative bodies such as Sri Mulam Praja Assembly.[92] Whereas there were also perspectives expressed in *Mangalodayam* that even the 'new' laws retained the spirit of 'our Dharmasastras', contrary to what was projected. According to this view, texts such as 'Hindu Law' differed only in

[87]'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 419.
[88]'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabhayude Niyamangal', 104.
[89]Punnaserrinambi Neelakantasarma, 'Namboothirimarum Vidyabhyasavum', *Mangalodayam*, Dhanu 1909, 59.
[90]Chengalathu Kunjiramamenon, 'Janmiyum Kudiyanum', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 6 (Medam 1909): 224–26; Chengalathu Kunjiramamenon, 'Janmiyum Kudiyanum: Vasthukaimattam', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 8 (Midunam 1909): 310–12.
[91]Mathoor Vasudevan Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabha', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1910): 30–31.
[92]Namboothiripad, 32.

interpretation. It was left to the Namboothiris to familiarise themselves with these laws and use them to their advantage.[93]

The Language Question

In the early-twentieth century Namboothiri print public, the question of language was a contentious theme. 'English' represented everything new, and depending on the openness to changing social conditions, Namboothiris took various stances on learning English: opposition, acceptance and selective adoption and rejection. In fact, 'English' was used to identify 'modern', so much so that 'English education' was the metonymy for modern education. Pitted on the other side of English were Malayalam and Sanskrit. While Malayalam was the everyday language of Namboothiris, Sanskrit enjoyed an important place in the ritualistic and intellectual aspects of their life. By the late-nineteenth century, there were attempts to modernise and popularise Sanskrit. To this end, Punnasseri Neelakanta Sarma, the first editor of *Mangalodayam*, established Saaraswathodyodini, the Sanskrit school in Perumudiyoor, in 1888.[94] There were organised efforts as well. In his article in the second issue of *Mangalodayam*, Sarma noted the efforts by certain Namboothiris towards reviving conventional Sanskrit education, which had been on the decline.[95] With the propagation of Aryan migration theory in the early-twentieth century Namboothiri print public, Sanskrit began to be associated with meanings of Brahmin cultural difference and superiority. In this context, articulations of 'corruption' of Namboothiri culture by interaction with Malayalam-speaking peoples began to appear.[96] Nevertheless, Malayalam remained their everyday language, considered *swabhasha* (literally, 'our language') and positioned as the alternative to English.

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[93]Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 3 (Makaram 1909): 114.
[94]K Muthulekshmi, '"Kasedyam Bhavanam": Samskrithachinthayumayi Chila Keraleeyamukhaamukhangal', in *Chintha Charithram: Adhunika Keralathinte Boudhika Charithrangal*, ed. Sajeev P V, 1st ed. (Kottayam: D C Books, 2020), 133.
[95]Neelakantasarma, 'Namboothirimarum Vidyabhyasavum', 58.
[96]M Seshagiriprabhu, 'Namboothirimaarude Poorvacharithram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 12 (Thulam 1910): 463.

Neelakanta Sarma's article[97] arguing favouring the *naveena vidyabhyasam* (modern education), including English, reportedly created a ripple within and outside the community.[98] For Sarma, knowledge of English was a practical necessity. Especially when the Namboothiri reign was expiring, and self-reliance was becoming essential. Sarma argued that one must be able to read on one's own, which will be helpful in the grasp of crucial knowledge such as those of modern legal proceedings. At this time, court cases were increasingly becoming common in Namboothiri life due to the new legal order instituted by the British. A common language like the *rajabhasha* (literally, royal language; administrative language) of English also makes communication between people possible, enabling one to overcome the limits of parochialism. However, the heart of Sarma's contention was his idea of the nature and function of language, which he posited while addressing the Namboothiri concept of Sanskrit as *devabhasha* (the language of Gods) and English as *mlechabhasha* (non-Vedic/ barbarous). According to Sarma, language in itself did not possess any divine or destructive powers. In learning a language, one acquires the knowledge of things and not the language per se, making language a means to knowledge. Secondly, *mlechatha* essentially refers to a lack of grammatical structure. If Sanskrit grammar is the only grammatical convention we must adhere to, we cannot use *naatubhasha* (local language). When the rule of the *mlecha* language was devised, Malayalam did not have grammar yet. If that did not stop us from adopting Malayalam, why not adopt English? Thirdly, the criteria of *mlechatha* cannot be attributed to English people, too, as they follow grammar. Besides, when Brahmins utter any language, including English, it becomes the *aryabhasha*. Also, the Aryan migration theory shows that even Westerners are Aryans.[99]

Furthermore, in his response to Sarma, Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran, the advocate of *paccha Malayalam* (pure Malayalam), acknowledged the indispensability of English, which had become the *rajabhasha*.[100] Nevertheless, Kunjikuttan Thampuran observed that although one cannot do without English in everyday life, there were practical solutions. For example, one can manage court cases

[97]Neelakantasarma, 'Namboothirimarum Vidyabhyasavum'.
[98]Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 110.
[99]Neelakantasarma, 'Namboothirimarum Vidyabhyasavum', 60–63.
[100]Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 114.

- with hired lawyers and the requisite grasp of the matter. In his response to Thampuran, Krishanunni Nair pointed out that without the knowledge of English, one cannot know if the lawyers represent the case well and the limitations of relying on English translators.[101] The English language must be equally acceptable if one can accept railways and telegraphs. However, Thampuran's key argument was for the vernacularisation of legal proceedings and knowledge disciplines like modern science. If *naveena sastrangal* (literally, new 'sciences'/ knowledges) are to be popularised among Namboothiris, those texts must be translated to Malayalam. After all, Namboothiris had the shining example of Japan before them, which advanced within a mere 50 years by vernacularising science textbooks and disseminating them among local people (*naatukaar*). Thus, along with institutions of conventional Namboothiri instruction, Thampuran suggested the establishment of colleges open to all castes with Malayalam science textbooks and industrial institutes for Namboothiris with knowledgeable Malayalam instructors.[102]

Clash of Temporalities

By the late-nineteenth century, we see a clash of different temporalities shaping the Namboothiri community, including its perception of itself and other communities. On the one hand was the extant temporality in the life of (male) Namboothiris, consisting of different *aachaarangal* (rituals), Vedic recitals and learning, worship, leisure in the form of feasts and performances of arts such as Kathakali. The everyday life of Namboothiri women was significantly different, confined to the 'inner' realm of the house performing domestic labour such as cooking, yet also sharing aspects of rituality and worship. The modern temporality with its 'timetables' of school, government offices, courts, jails and so on represented a disjuncture in the established ways of life of the Namboothiris. Hence, we find Sabha deciding to petition governments to ensure that Namboothiri undertrial prisoners are not forced into the 'transgression of caste rituals' (*jaathyaachaara virudha karmangal*) in jails till conviction.[103]

[101]Mannarkadu Cheriya Krishnanunninair, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 6 (Medam 1909): 231–32.
[102]Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 114–16.
[103]Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabha', 32.

A section of Namboothiris had begun to come out of the old notions of time, and they understood the new concepts of modern time. In the early-twentieth century public sphere, Namboothiris articulated the need to adopt new temporal values like industriousness and punctuality.[104] Such discussions also touched upon the need to dismantle old temporalities. In a speech titled 'Nammude Alasatha' (our idleness) made at the Edapalli *upasabha* of Cochin, Edappalli Krishnaraja identified five temporal practices rooted in the community's social structure that inhibited its passage to the modern: the excessively rigid disciplining during the pre-Samavarthanam phase causes Namboothiri boys to revel in the newfound freedom after the rite of passage in idle pursuits; the inheritance structure of the community is such that power over the estate is concentrated in the hands of the eldest offspring, leaving others to while away time; regular ritual events such as *vaaram* and *pooram* involving feasts and customary privileges such as *daanam* (offerings) are unhelpful in terms of instilling the idea of industry and self-reliance; and finally, Namboothiri pride rooted in caste status leaves Namboothiris in illusion while they are being ridiculed as in *Indulekha*. The author also urged the community to reorganise their life by adopting new occupational practices - government jobs, *kaithozhil* (literally, handicraft), agriculture and trade.[105]

The peculiar geography of Namboothiri communities in Kerala had been pointed out as a factor responsible for their 'backwardness'. For example, M. Seshagiriprabhu, a *paradesa* (non-native) Brahmin, argued that, unlike non-Malayali Brahmins who live together in clusters, there is minimal opportunity for Namboothiris living in isolated households for constant interaction with each other. This settlement pattern affected their 'morale' and hence, deteriorated the prospects for community prosperity.[106] However, not everyone agreed with this proposition, as Namboothiri settlements were considered superior to the clustered, *agrahara* settlement of *paradesa* Brahmins. A commentator disapprovingly stated that 'the villages of Palakkad Pattars with their

[104]Edappalli Ganapathiraja, 'Ulsaham', in *Samudaayabodham*, 1st ed., Edapalli Upasabha Grandhavali 1 (Thrissur: The Mangalodayam Co Ltd, 1914), 37–44; Edappalli Narayanaraja, 'Samayathinte Vila', in *Samudaayabodham*, 1st ed., Edapalli Upasabha Grandhavali 1 (Thrissur: The Mangalodayam Co Ltd, 1914), 60–66.
[105]Edappalli Krishnaraja, 'Nammude Alasatha', in *Samudaayabodham*, ed. V S Narayanan Namboothiri, 1st ed., Edapalli Upasabha Grandhavali 1 (Thrissur: The Mangalodayam Co Ltd, 1914), 16–28.
[106]Seshagiriprabhu, 'Namboothirimaarude Poorvacharithram', 458.

Agrahara system consist of the rows of houses touching each other and protruding into thoroughfares'.[107] In contrast to the barrack of Pattar residences, out in the open, a Namboothiri *mana*, *illam* or *matom,* on the other hand, is surrounded by servant settlements, agricultural lands, tanks, and temples of family deities. Here the residential arrangement is a marker of superiority.

As part of the spatial rearrangement of the community, there were proposals for each region's *upasabhakal* (sub-committees) to gather census data of Namboothiris as 'the Government census might not give us information that is important to us. This is why we should collect information through our sabhas and people of our community'.[108] The purpose of the census was that 'If they have a vision about knowing the statistics and information about the community, it will help them overcome the backwardness and actualise reform and progress…'[109] We see an attempt to bring the spatially and temporally fragmented Namboothiris to a place under a homogenous, singular modern time by applying a representational technique such as the census. The call for a caste-specific census for Namboothiris emerged from the community's anxiety at being left behind. This was when other caste communities, especially those at the lower levels of caste hierarchy, were gaining modern education, employment, and visibility in the modern institutions of colonial Kerala. The proposal for a Namboothiri census was a way of 'looking inwards' and demonstrated their identification of themselves as a 'population'.

At the same time, another section within the Namboothiris began to write about 'tradition'. They started comparing *parishkaram* with *pracheenam* (old/ conventional), which sometimes took the form of ridicule of the 'now' and lament for the 'then'. Thus we see a writer who calls himself 'Vidooshakan' (satirist) criticising the *parishkaari* generation for their lack of knowledge of 'our old customs and traditions' and detailing the differences in customs and traditions across castes.[110] Perhaps filling this need to

[107]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 592–93.
[108]K Ramavarmaraja, 'Namboothirimaarude Janavivaram', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 8 (Midhunam 1910): 338.
[109]Ramavarmaraja, 337.
[110]Vidooshakan, 'Nammude Chila Pracheena Aachaaropachaarangalum Mattum Mattum', *Vidyavinodini* 9, no. 11 (Chingam 1898): 370–81; Vidooshakan, 'Nammude Chila Pracheena Aachaaropachaarangalum Mattum Mattum', *Vidyavinodini* 9, no. 12 (Kanni 1898): 407–14.

document and preserve them, we see articles listing *parambarya* (traditional) and *poorva* (past) beliefs and practices.[111] While the Kerala Brahmins and kings had been decreeing the *aachaaram* (customs) and *kuladharmam* (caste beliefs) of all jaatis in Malayalam and made timely reforms in the past, both the British and the princely state governments refused to interfere in the '*varnashrama dharma* rules of the Hindus'. Besides, those with the requisite knowledge were dwindling.[112] In this context, Desamangalath Valiya Narayanan Namboothiripad called for utilising*Mangalodayam* as a platform for clarifications and opinions on *Keraleeyaaachaaram*, arrived through debate.[113] In response, the editor of *Mangalodayam* magazine announced that the issue would be discussed in Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha, following which a book will be published.[114]

An important binary that was widely circulated in the Namboothiri print public was the distinction between the 'inner' and 'outer', operationalised through the opposition between the *paralaukikam* (spiritual) and *laukikam/ aihikam* (worldly); the unchanging world of values and wisdom and the superficial transitory world of illusions; of tradition and 'modernisation'. In the face of the rapid social transformations around them, we see the Namboothiri community trying to make sense of the world by resorting to the categories such as 'worldly' and 'spiritual'. Thus, we see narratives attributing specific values as 'essential' to Namboothiris. These binary categories can be interpreted as a response to the apparent loss of Namboothiri social power. *Mangalodayam* became a platform for examining the moral and ethical values of/ among/ for Namboothiris. A prominent and immediate context for these assertions was the deprecatory characterisations of Namboothiris which were common in the writings of the time. For example, portrayals of the community in O Chandumenon's novel *Indulekha* had caused considerable anxiety. While some Namboothiris argued that such criticisms were valid,[115] others countered these narratives by ridiculing modernising

[111]K C Kesavapilla, 'Chila Parambaryavishwasangal', *Vidyavinodini* 12, no. 10 (Kanni 1901): 496–98; Palliyil Gopalamenon, 'Poorvaachaarangal', *Vidyavinodini* 12, no. 10 (Kanni 1901).
[112]Desamangalath Valiya Narayanan Namboothiripad, 'Aachaaram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1908): 19.
[113]Namboothiripad, 19–20.
[114]Namboothiripad, 20.
[115]Krishnaraja, 'Nammude Alasatha', 24–26.

Nairs. In this context, identifying the so-called Namboothiri qualities and values was another strategy to counter those narratives by other castes, especially Nairs, that ridiculed them for their resistance to modernity. One example is the article detailing the *ulkrishta gunangal* (sublime qualities) of Namboothiris by KM, a non-Namboothiri by admission, in *Mangalodayam*.[116]

KM wrote the article to respond to those B. A. graduates who ridiculed Namboothiris as 'the most foolish group in this civilised twentieth century'.[117] For this, KM distinguished between the 'outer' domain of changes, superficiality and illusions and the 'inner' realm of unchanging values and wisdom. While human nature has been to subjugate others by command over the outer domain - primarily through external appearance and hollow claims - the wise have always taken comfort in the knowledge that they can overcome others with their intelligence and scholarship.[118]Furthermore, while the 'modernising upstarts' belong to the superficial outer domain, Namboothiris, by their *vidya* (knowledge), *dhanam* (wealth) and *kulam* (caste), were the custodians of the latter.[119] In possession of this inner domain, KM identified Namboothiris as embodying qualities like the absence of self-praise, humility and honesty, which, cultivated over time, have become characteristic of the community.[120] Elaborating on these points, KM argued that Namboothiris are soft-spoken, polite, gentle and indirect in their criticism of others; they are good hosts, too; they possess *parengitha jnaanam* (the ability to understand others' minds and speak accordingly).[121] The mere presence of these qualities is not enough to make them *ulkrishta gunangal*; instead, the conscious nurturing of these qualities over generations makes them sublime.

Nevertheless, the author also acknowledges the need for Namboothiris to adapt according to the demands of the changing times.[122] KM also argued that the Namboothiri qualities have permeated into other castes in Malayalam so much so that compared to *paradesha* people (non-Malayalees), Malayalees are less superficial than

[116]K M, 'Namboothirimaarude Chila Ulkrishta Gunangal'.
[117]K M, 284.
[118]K M, 285–86.
[119]K M, 286–87.
[120]K M, 288.
[121]K M, 289–90.
[122]K M, 291–92.

the former.[123] This point implies that the Namboothiri values of the inner domain provided the moral core of the entire Malayalam region. This is a temporal move similar to the generalisation of Brahmin values as Bharateeya/ Indian values.

Some turned to the 'Hindu' philosophical texts to examine the 'Hindu' spiritual realm. In the early twentieth-century elite print public, we see claims like *sathyam* (truth) as an elemental *dharmam* (duty) of 'Hindus', as revealed in 'Hindu' texts such as the Shruthis, Smrithis and Upanishads.[124] According to one commentator, Vedanta philosophy validates the seeking of truth in the world of illusions and *asathyam* (non-truth) is fundamentally anti-Sastric.[125] Similarly, KC Manavikraman Raja analysed the question of *sadachaaram* (literally 'good conduct') in a series of articles by discussing the various ideas and principles articulated in various traditional and contemporary sources like Samkhya philosophy, Sankaracharya's rendition of the Gita and Swami Vivekananda.[126] For Raja, *sadachaaram* is that which enhances the *sattvika gunam*, which in turn gives the soul *paramaarthajnaanam*(ultimate knowledge/ wisdom/ enlightenment).[127]*Paramaarthajnaanam* is the state where the mind achieves liberation from the worldly realm through an absolute consciousness of the self, through *vairaagyam* (indifference) to everything mortal, and in an eternal state of purity and bliss.[128] Here, we can see how a mode of asceticism is adapted from the 'Hindu' philosophy to enable individuals and communities to cope with the changing world. Such philosophical moves/ recoveries/ deliberations contributed to fashioning a subjectivity rooted in caste-specific ethical/ moral sources. However, Raja recognises that as most of us are trapped or enchanted by the consumerist comforts offered by *parishkaram* (the modern world), it is difficult to attain *paramaartha jnaanam* by extricating one's self from the world.[129] Hence, Raja suggests *pravarthidharmam* for the worldly mortals, which at its core means to perform actions following the 'Vedas' duly.

[123]K M, 288–89.
[124]'Sathyam', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1908): 28.
[125]'Sathyam'.
[126]Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', Idavam 1909; K C Manavikraman Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 8 (Midhunam 1909): 301–6; K C Manavikraman Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 9 (Karkidakam 1909): 333–37.
[127]Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', Idavam 1909, 260–62.
[128]Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', Midhunam 1909.
[129]Raja, 304–5.

Although Raja argues that Vedas are not exclusively Brahminical literature and that every religion/ nationality can have its own Vedas, the Brahmin Vedas are superior to all other Vedas.[130] In such enunciations, we see the attempts to grapple with, reinterpret and establish the high ritual status associated with Brahmins.

At the same time, some commentators argued that the *paaralukikam* and *aihikam* could not remain separate and justified the need for *parishkaram*. M E Neelakantan Nambiar, for instance, argued that 'Bharatheeya' culture considered both the spiritual and worldly together for advancement in life, as apparently seen in Indian literature.[131] Accordingly, it is difficult to prioritise *dharma*, artha, *kama,* or *moksha* by neglecting the other three. Nambiar, therefore, made an argument for Namboothiris to consider venturing into agriculture for food production, handicrafts and industry and trade; acquire the knowledge of modern science (*sastram*) – which Namboothiris term as *vellakkarante divyavidya* (white man's divine knowledge) - rather than dwell on in the supposedly exalted 'Sanskrit sastras' for the welfare of Namboothiris; and participate in new forms of *rajaneethi* (politics).[132] Nambiar's fundamental contention was that while other communities have improved their command over these *aihika* realms, Namboothiris cannot afford to be indifferent in their *yoganidra* (yogic sleep).[133]

Vadakepat Narayanan Nair's use of the temporal metaphors of *balyam* (childhood/ underdeveloped) and *yauvvanam* (youth/ maturity) to understand Namboothiri *samudayam* (community) and their place in the larger 'Hindu' *samudayam* is relevant here.[134] *Balyam* is characterised by the relative absence of *paurusham* or the power of perception of the nature of the time (*kalam*) and space (*desam*) one is located in. Yauvvanam is characterised by the presence of the power of *paurusham*. With *paurusham*, one achieves prosperity (*jeevithasukham/ jeevithasaukaryam*); thus, *paurusham* is the driving force of *purusha prayathnam* (human effort), which in turn leads to prosperity. The wealth and status that the Namboothiri community enjoys

[130]K C Manavikraman Raja, 'Sadaachaaram', *Mangalodayam* 1, no. 10 (Chingam 1909): 385.
[131]M E Neelakantannambiar, 'Namboothirimaarum Aihikajeevithavum', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 4 (Kumbham 1910): 144.
[132]Neelakantannambiar, 145–47.
[133]Neelakantannambiar, 148.
[134]Vadakkepatt Narayanannair, 'Paurusham', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 9 (Karkidakam1910): 354–59; Vadakkepatt Narayanannair, 'Paurusham', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 10 (Chingam1910): 407–12.

result from the *purusha prayathnam* (human effort) of their forefathers, although the community is not in the *yauvvanam* phase today. This is because most community members are still in the *balyam* phase. However, a few who had acquired the perceptive power of their time-space condition have looked up to the advancements made by other communities and have begun to realise the importance of imitating the latter's methods. However, the *balyam* phase of most individuals in the community posed the risk of stunting the tree of *paurusham* that has begun to germinate. Here, Nair projects *paurusham* as a constant, which varies according to the cycle of time. Thus, through his framework of cyclical time, Nair signals the importance of a spatio-temporal consciousness as essential to prosper in the modern world. He also uses his cycle of time framework to argue in favour of the new changes.

Time and Modern Education

The early-twentieth century debate around modern education was a critical juncture as far as Namboothiris were concerned. On analysing aspects of this debate in its early phases in *Mangalodayam*, we see the use of ideas and metaphors of temporality and a clash of temporalities at the heart of it. In his much-debated article in the very second edition of the magazine, Punnaseri Neelakanta Sarma had termed modern education as *kaalochitham*, i.e. *timely*. Sarma's article described the power of time:

> No one can conquer time. No one creates time. One cannot but obey time. The sun rises in time. Likewise, it sets. Can anyone stop the sun? It rains in time. It changes to sunlight as well. Is it possible to stop any of these? So should we not be using the fruits of time as logic deems us fit? Like we use our days to work and nights to sleep? Like we make use of rains and summer?[135]

However, time is not constant, and we are powerless before the relentless march of time. Yet we can survive time: after all, our forefathers had shown by the example of obeying the laws of the changing time and prospering.[136] Thus modern education was the manifestation of *the* time, the very *present,* which Namboothiris must embrace. According to another contemporary commentator, the urgency of modern education to

[135]Neelakantasarma, 'Namboothirimarum Vidyabhyasavum', 58–59.
[136]Neelakantasarma, 59.

Namboothiris also stemmed from the fact that other caste communities, who had successfully adapted modern education, improved their lives, i.e., they were *ahead of time*.[137]

Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran's rebuttal to Sarma focused on the question of contesting incommensurable temporalities. In elaborating this point, the Malayalam poet and Vedic scholar, also known as 'Kerala Vyasa', differentiated between Kerala Brahmins' 'unique' knowledge systems such as the Sruthis, Smrithis and Tantras and 'ordinary' disciplines like Grihabharana Thanthram (domestic management), law and politics and 'the hitherto unfamiliar, industrially useful knowledge of *naveena sastrangal*.[138] The argument was that the *simultaneous* acquisition of both knowledge systems was not only impossible, but the rejection of *pracheena jnaanangal* (conventional/ old/ traditional domains of knowledge) for *naveena jnaanangal* (modern domains of knowledge) was also neither desirable.[139] The author further argued that not only can the lower and middle-class Namboothiris afford modern education, but the elites, who often go to school mainly after the *samavarthanam* (rite of passage after the traditional education), would have to study with younger and lower caste pupils. This is not only a humiliating prospect but also infringes upon the *varnashrama achaaranishta* (Brahminical ritualistic order).[140] Besides, in the words of another contemporary commentator, Namboothiri education's uniqueness was its exclusivity (one teacher teaching the Namboothiri wards in a respective *illam*) and speciality (imparting verses and knowledge particular to Namboothiris). In contrast, was the present school education system where 'many children of several castes are rounded up' and taught to utter 'meaningless words'.[141] In short, the argument is that Namboothiris will be in an undesirable situation of having to study with those of a 'lower' and qualitatively different temporality in the same space of the classroom; they will also be disgracefully made aware of their 'lag' in time in the modern due to the conventional education.

[137]Neelakantannambiar, 'Namboothirimaarum Aihikajeevithavum', 147.
[138]Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 110.
[139]Thampuran, 110–11.
[140]Thampuran, 113.
[141]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 593.

Already, some who had risen with modern education have come to lament the loss of India's traditional methods of knowledge.[142] That is, the advancement in time had paradoxically resulted in the lament for the 'lost' time. Thampuran is signalling toward the recovery of different temporalities, which are lost or fading out in the face of modern temporality. Furthermore, in Thampuran's estimation, the temporal project of rejuvenating tradition applies not only to Namboothiri knowledge corpus but also to Malayalees of other castes – including handicrafts, artisanal-martial (*aayudha vidya*) and corporeal (*marmajnaanam*) domains of knowledge.[143] Even as Thampuran would consider the Namboothiri corpus of knowledge as distinct and superior to other castes, some narratives traced specialist knowledge of other castes to Namboothiris. Thus, a *Rasikaranjini* article in 1906 observed that Namboothiris played a crucial role in promoting knowledge among other twice-born castes and the diverse Sudra groups.[144] According to this article, Namboothiris made substantial contributions to artisanal knowledge, medicine, astrology, and martial arts, which are the domains of Sudra castes; apparently, a Namboothiri from Vettathunadu who taught Sanskrit to Thunchath Ezhuthachan, the father of Malayalam language. The article also noted that Namboothiris accepted knowledge from other communities through texts and gurus.

Most of the writers were men in the emerging, predominantly upper-caste print public sphere. Moreover, the topics discussed in the Malayalam magazines corresponded to the male world. By the turn of the twentieth century, the question of women's place in society, their freedom and education began to be discussed. One such early article on the education of women titled 'Nammude Sthreekal' (Our Women) addressed the various objections raised against the topic: the risk of women' misusing' their freedom, the irrelevance of modern education for womanly tasks such as *grihabharanam* (household management) and the risk of adultery.[145] Parameshwara Menon argued that the dangers of misuse of freedom and adultery are equal for men and women and established the efficacy of modern education on *grihabharanam*.

[142]Thampuran, 'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 111.
[143]Thampuran, 111.
[144]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum'.
[145]Koonezhuth Parameswaramenon, 'Nammude Sthreekal', *Vidyavinodini* 12, no. 7 (Medam 1900): 294–301.

Menon noted that women could exercise liberty in a manner that does not infringe their *swadharmam* (religion/ community), and a 'right education' enhanced the knowledge of their duties and customs and the ability to perform them.[146] As with the question of adultery, Menon believed that women lacked agency in adulterous relationships; hence, men must bear the responsibility of the offence. Menon also suggested ways to minimise the risk of female adultery by making mutual love (than caste-community affiliations) the basis of male-female relationships and making women live with their husbands.[147] Thus Menon's endorsement of female education sought to reinscribe women within the patriarchal structures of caste and community, within the confines of the *graham* and *swadharma*. Even such arguments for seemingly incremental education were not taken kindly by conservative sections, especially those among the Namboothiris.

In an article on the uniqueness and superiority of Namboothiri education, the author stated that female education stopped after the teaching of fundamentals - certain *shlokas*(verses), reading and arithmetic, knowledge of determining time and reading calendars - as they 'have to enter *grihakrithya* (literally, household activities)'. Armed with education, Namboothiri girls became elevated to the *grihani* status within two to four years. Thus, girls get a chance to learn *grihabharana* (household management) and *paachakavrithi* (cooking), which are indispensable to women. Anything beyond this level of education is not only permitted; Namboothiris believe such an education can give them partial/ superficial (*kinjithajnaanam*), leading to *dusswathanthryam* (undesirable freedom). While the new education system offered a semblance of education to girls through five or eight years of schooling, it came at the cost of learning their *grihabharana krithyas,* such as *paachakavrithi*. This renders them with practically nothing for the future. Also, those arts such as music and painting, which 'women generally have a special liking for', are prohibited for Namboothiri women lest they become undesirable to the latter. The author also acknowledged that while such a stance may invite criticism, it is an unchangeable convention.[148]

[146]Parameswaramenon, 297.
[147]Parameswaramenon, 299–301.
[148]'Namboothitimaarum Vidyaabhyaasavum', 594–95.

Here commentators exhibited an awareness of the nature of new temporalities and the ruptures they create. There were several temporal moves at play here. As an attempt toward consolidating opinions within the community, *Mangalodayam* presented to the Namboothiri print public the perspectives of those 'exemplary individuals' (*mahaanmaar*) who had lived decades ago. Thus a 1909 edition of the magazine reproduced a letter written 38 years ago by 'the former guru of the maharaja of Cochin and a foremost authority on Namboothiri affairs, Brahmashree Koodalloor Kunjunni Namboothiripad'.[149] The letter dated the twenty-seventh day of Chingam month in the year 1047 (Malayalam era) was an invitation to several Namboothiris and others for a meeting to discuss the question of modern education for the community. At the outset, the letter mentioned the reluctance shown by the wards of Namboothiris and other *jenmis* (landlords) to attend government schools where those from different castes and classes are admitted.[150] 'However, English learning being essential to all, a school that follows *jati* (caste) and *maanamaryada* (honour and convention) are to be established by the *jenmis*. The letter called for a meeting on the thirtieth day of the month of Kanni at the Sanskrit school in Thrissivaperoor to discuss Namboothiri schools.[151] Here, the commentators were engaging in temporal moves not just in terms of the past like Thampuran did but also in terms of present and future.

The Project of History

In this juncture of the clash of several temporalities, the community adopted several spatial-temporal strategies of inversion, of looking into the Namboothiri self and defining its purported essence. As part of this, they started looking *for* their pasts. *Mangalodyam* had undertaken attempts to collect and preserve 'rare and valuable texts' and gather information about scholarly vernacular texts and requested the active participation of readers in it.[152] Along with this archiving work was the 'work of history' attempted by various writers in the upper caste print public sphere. Considering the set of articles that investigated the history of Brahmins using different sources and methods in the early-twentieth century, we see the dominant use of Aryan migration theory. This

[149]'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 420.
[150]'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 420.
[151]'Namboothirimaarude Vidyabhyasam', 420.
[152]'Mangalodayam', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 1 (Vrishchikam 1910).

was when several caste communities in Kerala had been preoccupied with their 'origins', as we can see in the print public sphere of the time. Some communities had resorted to narratives of migration from other geographical regions and continents. For example, Ezhavas were considered descendants of the migrants from Eezham (Sri Lanka) and Nairs from Nepal. However, what differentiated Brahmin use of Aryan theory from other castes' theories of migration is its use to state their superiority over other social groups and, more importantly, the attempt to group themselves with 'the superior European races'. For this, they used the work of European Indologists and the perspectives of nationalists like Bal Gangadhara Tilak. For example, the article 'Aryanmaarude Adyanivasam' (home of Aryans) examined the theories that state Asia and Europe as the Aryan homeland before discussing Tilak's supposedly ingenious suggestion of Uthara Meru as their land of origin.[153] Tilak's use of Vedic, Zorastrian and other Brahminical texts and astrology in arriving at conclusions that match European theories was highlighted.[154]

Another article, 'Namboothirimaarude Poorvacharithram' (the history of Namboothiris), written by M Seshagiriprabhu, advocated and used Brahminical texts, Aryan migration theory, other Indological methods, as well as anthropometry to establish the history of Namboothiris in particular and Brahmins in general. Often, such narratives became occasions to reinstate the caste hierarchy. Beginning with a reference to Sankaracharya as the exemplar of Kerala Brahminhood, Prabhu considers texts such as *Keralamahathmyam, Bhoogolapuranam, Keralavisheshamahathmyam, Keralolpathi*, *Sahayadri Khantam* of *Scandapuranam* as well as the *grandhavaris* (chronicles) accessed from temples as possible sources of Namboothiri history.[155] Prabhu disregarded the many contemporary accounts of Namboothiri history – which, in his view, relies on imagination rather than textual sources- in favour of the Aryan migration theory advocated by Indologist-linguists. Using *Keralolpathi* that the Kerala Brahmins are the Aryans who migrated from northern India, Prabhu classified them as Gowda Saraswatha Brahmins, citing the apparent similarity in rituals between

[153]K V M, 'Aryanmaarude Aadyanivaasam', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 6 (Medam 1910): 209–16.
[154]K V M, 215.
[155]Seshagiriprabhu, 'Namboothirimaarude Poorvacharithram', 457–58.

Kanyakubja Brahmins and Namboothiris as evidence.[156] Here there is an attempt to homogenise Brahmins on a pan-Indian scale.

More importantly, the author claimed the distinctiveness of Namboothiris with respect to the larger social groups of Kerala. This was done by discrediting the theory of the 'conversion' of *moolanivasikal* (original inhabitants) of Kerala into Brahmins by either Parasurama or Sankaracharya. The loss/ replacement of Sanskrit with Malayalam as their everyday language (Sanskrit) and the 'corruption' of their culture are attributed to the peculiar geography and settlement pattern of Namboothiris. The textual reference to the conferring of Brahminhood to sage Viswamitra, a non-Brahmin, is at best a metaphor for the power of penance.[157] Even 'modern' evidence suggested the uniqueness of Namboothiris – such as their relatively low population, the etymology of 'Namboothiri' listed in John Garret's *A Classical Dictionary of India* and the anthropometric data cited in the Travancore Census Report of 1901.[158] The key argument here was that Brahminhood is not transactional, apparently deduced from Sastric, Puranic and other textual sources.[159] The implication is that not only are Namboothiris different from the rest of Malayalam's caste communities, but they are also one of the best races in India and the whole world. After all, European Aryans being world rulers and Aryan history being world history, any group called Aryan are 'noble'.[160]The 'purity' of Namboothiris over other castes of Kerala is affirmed; they are linked to the Aryan race, which was supposedly the supra race in the world.

These historical imaginations were also connected to colonial anthropology, especially the enumeration/ classification/ determination of castes.[161]Veemboor Kadalayi Kunjikkuttan Namboothiripad appreciated and endorsed the colonial project of 'castes, their origins and customs' at the beginning of the series of articles he published under the title 'Malayalathile Jaathinirnayam' (literally, the determination of

[156]Seshagiriprabhu, 462–63.
[157]Seshagiriprabhu, 463–64.
[158]Seshagiriprabhu, 467.
[159]Seshagiriprabhu, 465.
[160]Seshagiriprabhu, 462.
[161]Nicholas B Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

castes in Malayalam).[162] Although the author used the term 'jati' as a social group, such narratives of castes and communities were published in the broader upper-caste print public sphere, with the Aryan migration theory providing a significant impetus. Local upper-caste writers attempted anthropology and ethnology in the context of Kerala through the history of their respective castes. In this, these writers relied on Brahminical texts such as *Keralolpathi* as authoritative sources even as they stated the need for rational methods to avoid contradictions and inconsistencies.[163] Besides, such histories used the idea of religion as a way of classifying social groups. Veemboor Namboothiripad refers to the 'entry of Hindus into Kerala' in his interpretation of *Keralolpathi*: accordingly, after gifting Kerala to Brahmins, Parasurama brought the Sudras (Nairs) into the land.[164] He then provided a religion-wise classification starting with the Hindus (further divided into castes according to the varna classificatory scheme), followed by 'ghost-believing', *malavaasikal* (hill inhabitants),[165] Muhammadeeyars, Christians and 'other religions' such as Jains and Sikhs. While Veemboor Namboothiripad's series on caste follows the category of religion to understand Kerala society, Jathavedan Namboothiripad restricts to the elaboration of a 180-verse Sanskrit sloka that explains the origin of different castes in the land of Parasurama.[166] What is significant about the rendition of these caste narratives is their timing. While subaltern castes in the early-twentieth century had been mounting a challenge to the Brahminical caste hierarchies, these 'caste-determining' (*jaathinirnaya*) exercises sought the reinstatement and rearrangement of caste back into the same position.

Here we can see three broad spatio-temporal moves employed. Firstly, we see the attempt to unify the disparate Brahmin groups in India into a single time through

[162]Veemboor Kadalayi Kunjikkuttan Namboothiripad, 'Malayalathile Jathinirnayam', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 6 (Medam 1910): 240.
[163]Namboothiripad, 239–40 There are other examples as well. See, Pazhoor Vadakkillath Jathavedan Namboothiripad, 'Jaathinirnayam', *Rasikaranjini* 3, no. 1 (Chingam 1904): 36–40.
[164]Namboothiripad, 'Malayalathile Jathinirnayam', Medam 1910, 240.
[165]Veemboor Kadalayi Kunjikkuttan Namboothiripad, 'Malayalathile Jathinirnayam', *Mangalodayam* 2, no. 10 (Chingam 1910): 427.
[166]See the following issues of *Rasikaranjini*: Chingam, Kanni, Thulam & Vrishchikam (1904); and Kumbham & Meenam (1905).

the Aryan migration theory. At this point, we see regional tales of Brahmin migration such as *Keralolpathi* subsumed into the Aryan migration theory. The levelling of regional variations and hierarchies within Brahmins into the single Aryan category is also a spatial move. Secondly, there were simultaneous attempts to resist flattening regional diversities into pan-Indian Brahminhood. Thus, we have narratives of the uniqueness and superiority of Malayala Brahmins over Paradesa Brahmins. Thirdly the effort to construct a pan-Indian Brahminhood was accompanied by the attempt to generalise Brahmin ideals and values as 'Bharatheeya'/'Indian' and Malayala/ Keraleeya values. Thus, a single temporal experience is generalised as pan-Indian/ pan-regional temporality.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to examine the inherited and seemingly coexisting publics of EMS Namboodiripad. It tried to describe what was taken from Western experiences to make a literary public among the upper castes, including Namboothiri Brahmins. In doing so, the chapter sought to map the ideas, aspirations, and anxieties fundamental to the shaping of the community public; and thus contextualise the new imaginaries that EMS Namboodiripad inherited. An aspect that worked as an inherited public sphere for EMS was a literary public that existed among the Namboothiri Brahmins and their associated social worlds. This chapter has shown how print modernity was a juncture of new departures for the Namboothiri Brahmins in the early twentieth century. Here I look at how caste elites envisaged a literary public modelled after the West.

The modern disciplining of the self, based on principles of caste morals, was often reflected in the reform activities of various communities in Kerala. Thus, EMS Namboodiripad's inherited publics had already initiated the disciplining of time. EMS, as we will see, would engage with multiple temporalities. The disciplining of temporalities reflected in the evolution of spaces and the strategy of 'looking inwards' resulted in the project of writing histories in the early twentieth century Kerala. We see communities occupying and utilising the print public sphere in this context.

When Namboorthiris started interpreting the modern, the very understanding came with a notion of the old-fashioned and non-modern. More importantly, the

sections above illustrate how Namboothiris started seeing themselves in history, i.e., how they 'historicised' themselves as modern and non-modern. Thus, they engaged in several strategies, including disowning and reclaiming pasts. While a section of the community was apprehensive about the fading transcendental lives of the Namboothiris, some found the modern and the attendant progress in worldly affairs worthy. *Mangalodayam* worked as an interlocutor between the Namboothiri past, present and future. The inception of *Mangalodayam* and the various temporal deliberations in it can be interpreted as a re-articulation of the Namboothiri caste status.

Thus, the evolution of the political subject among the Namboothiris was primarily driven by aspects of caste in the public sphere. The initiations made by the Namboothiri Brahmins in the modern public sphere were based on their anxieties that the community, which had once been the pinnacle of Kerala, had reached a state where they had become less relevant. The survey of a few early-twentieth century narratives analysed in this chapter shows how the Malayala Brahmins had actively engaged in introspection about the Namboothiri self through a search into their pasts and subsequent interpretations. The placement of Namboothiris vis-à-vis other caste communities in Kerala and India was from an exclusive vantage point of Brahmin subjectivity. They always tried to define other castes by referring to mythical pasts.

The next chapter will analyse EMS's interventions in this inherited and contemporary public sphere. We will see how EMS, as part of a new generation of Namboothiri reformers emerging in the 1920s, alters this public sphere by critically examining the questions of Namboothiri self and being.

Chapter III.

THE 'PROTEAN SELF': EMS'S INTERVENTIONS IN THE NAMBOOTHIRI PUBLIC SPHERE AND THE SECULARISATION OF CASTE

In the previous chapter, we looked at the positioning of modernity among the Namboothiri community in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by considering how the community was beginning to reinvent itself through the emerging print public. It showed how the Namboothiris engaged in debates as it negotiated colonial modernity and how the community became oriented to the opportunities it opened up. While the community strove to adapt to the new order, it sought to maintain the hegemonic hold over caste privileges and power. The chapter also attempted to map the modern spaces in the making, which eventually got woven into print and the institutional and structural spaces of associations. By the time EMS made his entry, the community public sphere he had inherited was on the verge of change. However, this Namboothiri public was still rooted in the modernised form of caste and retained enough power to enforce the boundaries of caste.

For EMS Namboodiripad, born in 1909, a year after the establishment of the Yogakshema Sabha, his early life was confined to the sphere of the *illam*, temples and Namboothiri learning centres, as shown in chapter I. A crucial agency that initiated EMS into the modern was the public he experienced in different ways. The exposure to modern life that EMS experienced in urbanising towns like Thrissur opened up new worlds before him. Above all, his interactions with English-educated peers, some of whom were associated with the Namboothiri reform movement and the habit of reading newspapers and magazines, kindled his interests in public affairs. The exposure allowed EMS to link events and movements in India with global events.[1] Subsequently, EMS's interventions within the inherited community publics imparted the initial impetus to his later engagements as a left intellectual.

[1]EMS Namboodiripad, "Urban Refinement," in *How I Became a Communist*, trans. P K Nair, Library (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 40–42.

In 1923, when he turned fourteen, EMS became an office-bearer of the Yogakshema Sabha, entrusted with reviving the organisation's subcommittee office in the Valluvanad region, thus marking his entry into a life of public interventions.[2] Experience in making the minutes of the meetings, sending invitations to various branches of the Yogakshema Sabha and preparing content for the notices familiarised EMS with the ways of a modern association. The monthly meetings of the subcommittees were often conducted in well-off *illams* or on the temple premises. Often disconnected and with disparate agendas, I will call these spaces' publics', which EMS came to engage in/ with. While these engagements provided organisational experience, these meetings also helped EMS develop oratory skills. EMS developed the ability to form and articulate opinions and engage in debates through participation in these community publics.[3] By 1926-27, EMS would begin writing in magazines on community issues. In his interventions in the community public, EMS raised questions about the possibilities of becoming modern through education and the need for a change in the social life of the Namboothiri Brahmins. EMS's exhortations toward a new 'rational language' coincided with a juncture when the Namboothiri community opened up to the larger possibilities of colonial modernity.

The chapter captures the initial shift in EMS's worldview from the immediate self-critical locations of Namboothiri identity to that of a universalist understanding of the human heavily influenced by the liberal political language of rights. Intervening in the Namboothiri public, EMS argued in favour of the reformist call for 'making the Namboothiris human'. EMS proposed a 'revolutionary' programme for the community based on desubjectivation. De-ritualisation and acquisition of new values, worldviews, and practices befitting a 'modern' life were the ways to achieve desubjectivation of Namboothiri selves into human beings. At the same time, EMS's writings also reveal the resilience of Brahminness and Namboothiriness in modernised and de-ritualised contexts and the limitations of the desubjectivation programme he passionately argued for. Here, I use the idea of the secularisation of caste developed in Aditya Nigam's analysis of the Dalit critique of modernity.[4] A central concept in his argument is the idea

[2]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal',67.
[3]Namboodiripad, 67–68.
[4]Aditya Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique', *Economic and*

of the 'protean Brahmin self', which adapted to modernity and used the same towards preserving Brahmin social power.

This chapter will first provide the context of Namboothiri reforms in outlining the emergence of the 'progressive' Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham in the late-1920s, of which EMS was a part. The vigorous reform advocated by the Sangham impacted the Yogakshema Sabha in significant ways. In contextualising EMS's participation in the reform movement between 1923 and the late-1940s, the chapter provides an overview of his writings in the community public sphere before focusing on the caste critique. This critique proposed a project of desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self. We then examine the limits of the desubjectivation process EMS proposed, using the idea of the 'protean Brahmin self'. The following discussion shows how EMS, through his interventions in the Namboothiri community public, sought to transform the ritual power of the Namboothiri Brahmins into a secular power in the imagined Aikya Keralam (United Kerala).

The Changing Contours of Namboothiri Reform

In the 1920s, the landscape of Namboothiri reform was characterised by two distinct approaches. On one end of the continuum was the set of Namboothiris who defended conventional ways of being. On the other end were those Namboothiris who argued for a radical transition of the community along modern norms. In 1908, there was only a single Namboothiri community association, Yogakshema Sabha, launched with the stated aim of consolidating the geographically dispersed Malayala Brahmins and reforming them. By the late-1920s, when EMS entered the sphere of community activism, there were several organisations, some branched out under the Sabha and others claiming autonomy from the parent organisation. For example, Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham was established as the youth wing of Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha in 1919. It worked as a volunteer group of the Namboothiri youth. By 1928, the Yuvajana Sangham broke away from Yogakshema Sabha and functioned as an independently registered organisation.[5] The Sangham published a periodical titled *Unni*

Political Weekly 35, no. 48 (December 2000): 4256–68.

[5]I. V. Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 2001), 111–13.

Namboothiri as its mouthpiece, while the Sabha published *Yogakshemam*. EMS's engagement in the community public spread over his participation in these two community organisations.

While conflicting interests and streams of thought existed within the community reform movement, there were points of convergence, at least in the early stages of Yogakshema Sabha. An illustration of the complexity of positions adopted by community members is the publisher's statement in *Unni Namboothiri* on the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924. The statement said that the most promising way to accomplish reform of customs is the decree of religious authority made in the presence of the Maharaja than satyagraha and collective sacrifice, which were the methods of struggle in the national movement.[6] Here, *Unni Namboothiri* chose to align with traditional structures of power. In this early stage, the same reformers who held progressive views about community affairs chose to be supporters of monarchy in their political beliefs. By late-1920s, there were instances of active opposition to traditional forms of power. An example is the dissent they recorded after the Maharaja of Kochi refused to give assent to the Namboothiri Bill in the early 1930s. The Sangham responded through a series of strategies, including hunger strikes and other forms of protest.[7] The Sangham had adopted explicit oppositional strategies, considering its initial stance of submission to royal diktats. Compared to its parent organisation, Yuvajana Sangham showed more proclivity towards reform and change by the late-1920s.

With the activation of a set of young 'radical' reformers within the Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham in the late-1920s, the topic of life struggles due to the outmoded ways of the community and the problems of Namboothiri women received unprecedented attention. This meant that questions of marriage, family and property relations became the points of contention in the broader question of the reform of the community. In Yuvajana Sangham meetings, themes such as youth and unemployment, colonial legislation regarding Namboothiri customs and traditions, modern education, reform of attire and the question of Namboothiri women were discussed. Resistance

[6]Cited in Babu, 111.
[7]EMS Namboodiripad, "Vaivahika Viplavam," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 116.

towards the rejection of *pazhama* (conventional/ traditional ways of being), the closed attitude towards modern means of wealth creation such as businesses and the hesitation to enter modern professions for fear of transgressing community strictures were subjected to trenchant criticism. Yuvajana Sangham concluded that to access government jobs, English education and freedom for women were essential; challenging the inequality inherent in the running of *taravad*/ household and the false pride regarding caste occupations became imperative to adapt to the changing social norms. Soon, the youth meetings declared tradition/conventions and the Dharmasastras as stumbling blocks in realising the above objectives in the new social order.

In addition to their approaches to substantive questions, the Sangham and Sabha differed in their modes of action. Most of the decisions taken by Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha to reform the community had remained mainly as formal proposals.[8] For example, the Sabha had advanced various proposals over the years – installation of Namboodiri schools in its eleventh annual meeting, condemnation of polygamous relations followed by the elder sons of the community and freedom of marriage of individuals through royal statute in its twelfth meeting, unification of disparate sections within the community in the thirteenth anniversary, ending the *adhivedana* marriage system that prohibited the marriage of younger sons in the fourteenth meeting – none of which could be translated into action. The Yuvajana Sangham, on the other hand, actively attempted to put into practice most of their objectives: timely and rational reform in religious, ritual, literary and economic spheres of Namboothiris and inculcation of morality, love for community and patriotism; establishment or acquisition of schools, hostels, workshops/industries, magazines and newspapers and setting up of printing press; running of libraries and book centres as well as publishing of books; extend aid and cooperation for the well-being of all fraternal communities.[9] Towards realising these objectives, the Namboothiri youth also embraced radical, everyday protest strategies, including acts of sartorial and corporeal transgressions. Examples include breaking the *poonoolu* and the removal of the *poorvashika*/ tuft, considered sacred caste markers.

[8]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 111, 121.
[9]Babu, 121–22.

The differences between the Yogakshema Sabha and Yuvajana Sangham over community-related questions and public issues culminated in ideological debates and disagreements. *Yogakshemam* and *Unni Namboothiri* became the platform for these debates and exchanges between their parent organisations. *Yogakshemam* and *Unni Namboothiri* held different approaches to implementing reform agendas, as is clear from a review of its articles. There were also magazines like *Sudarshanam* that upheld conservative views, while *Pasupatham* became the mouthpiece of young, radical Namboothiris.[10] *Unni Namboothiri's* role was to unite the Namboothiri youth who were open to change and work towards achieving the reform agendas for the progress of the community. The magazine exhorted its readers to think of revolutionary ideas in social and cultural arenas.[11] The magazine was also used to raise critical questions about the superiority of the Namboothiris in society.[12]

EMS's interventions in community affairs entered a new phase as soon as he joined the Yuvajana Sangham, especially when he won the right to vote within the Sangham in 1928.[13] This was when VT Bhattathiripad and other Namboothiri reformers like Premji were posing questions on Namboothiri marriage and the plight of *antarjanams* through dramas. EMS was part of the reform interventions, such as organising reformist plays inside the *illams* and other Namboothiri spaces. One of the most critical moments in this episode was the staging of *Adukalayilninnu Arangatheku* (From Kitchen to Stage) in 1929, a play penned by VT.[14] The experience of being associated with the staging of the play and observing its responses added to the understanding EMS gained from his community activism; the sense of aesthetics cultivated in EMS's initial years in the cultural arena was reflected in his public life later. Art and theatrical interventions remained a vital medium for propagating reform ideas within the community. For example, as we see, Namboothiri men from the Yuvajana

[10]EMS Namboodiripad, "Mithavatha-Viplava Chinthagathikal Samoohikarangath," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 89.
[11]EMS Namboodiripad, "'Unni Namboothiri,'" in *How I Became A Communist*, trans. P K Nair (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 95.
[12]EMS Namboodiripad, "Against Brahminism," in *How I Became A Communist*, trans. P K Nair (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 105.
[13]Namboodiripad, 'Pothupravarthanathinte Aadyapaatangal', 69.
[14]Namboodiripad, 'Vaivahika Viplavam', 114–15.

Sangham formed marriage sub-committees to materialise the critical issues raised through dramas.[15]

The vigorous period of reform initiated by the activation of Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham made the period between the late-1920s to early-1930s the high point of Namboothiri reform. It was also the phase when Namboothiri reformers, especially the young 'radical' section within the community movement, became influenced by the broader political movements and ideologies in Kerala and India. The exchange of ideas and strategies had a decisive influence on the nature of the Namboothiri reform movement in a porous 'Namboothiri public sphere'.[16]

Although the first-generation Namboothiri reformers maintained connections with the Congress in the early-twentieth century, it was mainly directed to preserving *jenmi* interests. As Congress came under the sway of a rising tenant movement in the late-1920s, Namboothiris distanced themselves from the national movement.[17] In the 1920s, Gandhian nationalism had influenced a significant number of Namboothiris, especially the new generation of young Namboothiris. EMS had started wearing *khadi* and learning Hindi under the influence of the ardent Gandhian Namboothiri reformers he met in Thrissur. The nationalist inclinations of reformers resulted in contentions within the movement. For instance, in the annual meeting of the Yogakshema Sabha in 1929, the Yuvajana Sangham members, who were actively engaged with the Congress, criticised the Sabha for meeting the Simon Commission[18] and submitting a representation on behalf of the community instead of boycotting it.[19]

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[15]Namboodiripad, 115.

[16] Given the diverse ideologies and political orientations of Namboothiri reformers, a strict demarcation of the 'Namboothiri public sphere' cannot be made. The interaction of Yuvajana Sangham members with other ideologies and movements resulted in engagements and the exchange of ideas with the leadership of other community movements. In this period, the young reformers became influenced by Gandhism, rationalism, atheism, and left ideologies. Moreover, Yuvajana Sangham members came to collaborate with the nationalists of varied ideological persuasions and ally with reform movements of other communities. The differences of opinion, factionalism and mutual criticisms that characterised the community movement of the 1930s also had to do with the specific differences in political orientations. See pp. 122-146 in I V Babu, *Keraleeya Navodhanavum Namboothirimarum*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society ltd, 2001).

[17]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 122.

[18] Congress had called for the boycott of the Simon Commission during its visit to India in 1928 and 1929.

[19]EMS Namboodiripad, "Uppu Satyagraham," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram:

In the early-1930s, reformers, including EMS, had organised meetings in many *illams* where they sang nationalist songs, organised processions and raised political slogans.[20] The Namboothiri reformers also adapted some of the methods of the national struggle for the cause of reform. For example, the Yachana Yathra (plea tour) conducted under the leadership of VT in 1931 from Thrissur to Malabar collecting 'alms' for Namboothiri schools resembled the Dandi March undertaken by Gandhi in 1930.[21] The picketing of *adhivedana* marriages was another campaign inspired by nationalist protest methods.[22] Yuvajana Sangham members had also been associated with other movements in contemporary Kerala, such as the Guruvayoor Satyagraha. EMS was *Unni Namboothiri's* correspondent who had covered the Satyagraha. The Sangham had actively campaigned in a plebiscite conducted to decide on temple entry. For instance, a set of reformers under the leadership of VT campaigned in Ponnani taluk. When the temple authorities refused to open it to 'untouchable castes' despite 73 per cent of the people supporting it, VT wrote an article titled 'Now Let Us Set Fire to Temples' in 1933, following which an arrest warrant was issued to him, and the government confiscated *Unni Namboothiri*.[23]

By the early-1930s, many young Namboothiri reformers had come under the influence of left ideas, which was reflected in the writings of *Unni Namboothiri*. EMS recalls that the weekly had come to gravitate towards a 'leftist nationalism' represented by Jawaharlal Nehru.[24] In 1933, EMS noted that the left-wing Sangham members, a minority in the Sabha earlier, gained control of the Sabha. So much so that:

> Today, there is no need for a Sangham anymore. The extremists of yore have become the activists of the Sabha. The objectives and ideals of the Sabha and the Sangham are the same now.[25]

Chintha Publishers, 2008), 125–26.
[20]EMS Namboodiripad, "To the Prison," in *How I Became A Communist*, trans. P K Nair (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 130.
[21]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 140.
[22]Babu, 132.
[23]Babu, 122.
[24]EMS Namboodiripad, "Unni Namboothiri," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 105.
[25]EMS Namboodiripad, "Sabhakalude Ekeekaranam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 156.

In fact, EMS's initiation into communist ideas had been significantly shaped by his close interaction with left-leaning writers like Kesavadev and KK Warrier, who were associated with *Unni Namboothiri*.[26] In this period, EMS also reviewed communist literature in *Unni Namboothiri,* such as the biography of Lenin and Trotsky authored by Malayalam writer P. Kesavadev.[27] These ideological influences are visible in EMS's writings in the Namboothiri publications. Given the reformist passion for 'progressive' changes, they had become more inclined towards left ideologies than Congress.[28]

The revitalisation of Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha in the Ongallur reorganisation meeting of 1944, following the lull of the late-1930s, was the result of the then communist party's stance to bring caste organisations into its fold.[29] EMS's *Yogakshemam* editorial preceding the Ongallur convention indicates this. In it, EMS pointed out that despite the ideological incompatibility between the Yogakshema Sabha and the Communist Party,[30] there were common threads in their respective aims: the modernisation of the community by the transformation of Namboothiris into 'normal citizens', the uplift of women, the restructuring of the joint family into smaller families.[31] EMS's keynote address in Ongallur advanced the concept of the labouring Namboothiri as opposed to the stereotypical indolent Namboothiri. It also envisioned Namboothiris becoming part of the modern proletariat through labour in fields and factories. However, the reorganisation of the Sabha for apparent political interests invited vehement criticism. As a communist political leader and intellectual, EMS's engagements with the Namboothiri reform efforts had come under scrutiny within the community.

Reproaches about the alleged offence of the community platform being used to propagate communism criticised the Ongallur reorganisation. The initiatives of the

[26]Namboodiripad, '"Unni Namboothiri"', 1976, 95–96.
[27]EMS Namboodiripad, "Agniyum Sphulingavum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 134–35.
[28]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 142.
[29]Babu, 142.
[30]EMS Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimar Manushyarakan," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1944-45)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 294.
[31]EMS Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1944-45)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 295.

Ongallur meeting, such as the *thozhil kendram* (employment centre) and Namboothiri women's organisation, were censured through satire and dramas. An organisation called Namboothiri Youth Congress and a journal to counter the perceived communist interference was set up. The participation of Namboothiri women of the *thozhil kendram* in the largely communist-led Paliyam Satyagraha of 1947-48[32] invited vehement criticism. In this period, a demand to end Namboothiri schools, especially the school and hostel in Thrissur, emerged as reformers perceived such schools as reinforcing Namboothiri pride. Instead, Namboothiri children must join public schools. In place of specific caste-based training, Namboothiri children require exposure to modern knowledge disciplines such as science and technology. This demand led to a contentious debate in Yogakshemam between the advocates of 'revolutionary reform' and those who supported a reformist agenda with Namboothiri characteristics. IV Babu, a historian of Namboothiri reform, noted that this period bore witness to the transition of ideological differences within the Namboothiri reform movement. The shift was from a right-left/ conservative-progressive dichotomy to Communist-Congress political polarisation in the late-1940s.[33]

EMS and the Reform Movement

We can divide EMS's association with the Namboothiri reform movement chronologically into three phases — (i) 1923 to 1929, (ii) 1929 to 1932 and (iii) 1933 to the late-1940s. EMS was familiar with the reform movement through family members and acquaintances who were part of the Yogakshema Sabha, his reading of reform literature and his encounter with reformist Namboothiris in Thrissur in 1921. However, his formal association with it began when EMS became the secretary of the Yogakshema *upasabha* in his taluk, Valluvanad, between 1923 and 1924, before he resigned to join the school. By admission, EMS had subscribed mainly to what he calls a 'conservative' idea of reform in this initial phase.[34] This perspective allowed only those changes

[32] The Satyagraha was launched against the prohibition applied to lower castes regarding access to roads near the residence and temple of Paliyath Achans, the ministers of the Cochin monarchs.
[33] Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 144.
[34] EMS Namboodiripad, "Randu Nirahara Samarangal," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 154.

deemed 'essential' for Namboothiris to cope with the fast-paced social changes so that reform should not interfere with the Namboothiri-ness.[35]

Following this largely conservative view, EMS would support reform measures like modern education, legal reform of family and marriage and moderation of everyday observance of ritual purity in a manner that did not breach any rules of caste. However, as he gains new concepts through his readings and the new experiences outside his home, EMS comes to be critical of the conservative position. EMS learnt about European revolutions from his school textbooks in the 1926-27 period, and he engaged with this concept throughout his intellectual career, starting with the Namboothiri reform. One of the first occasions EMS applied the concept of revolution was to the question of community reform, and these reflections appeared in a few articles published from 1927. Upon completing five years of schooling in Perinthalmanna (Valluvanad) and Palakkad, EMS chose Thrissur as the destination for college. By then, he had begun to be known as a writer, publishing articles on reform in a few Namboothiri magazines.

The second phase of EMS's association with the movement started in 1929 and ended in 1932 when he was arrested for participating in Civil Disobedience Movement. Thrissur, the location of the office of the Yogakshema Sabha, housing the Mangalodayam Press (which printed *Yogakshemam* and *Unni Namboothiri*) and its library was the pivot of Namboothiri reform activity.[36] EMS's choice of Thrissur was, therefore, to develop his budding interest in a 'public' career, especially journalism, by associating with *Unni Namboothiri*. This phase in Thrissur, when EMS was most active in the reform programme, was the pinnacle of 'radical' reformist activity.[37] Because EMS was fascinated with the idea of revolution, we see him gravitating towards activities championed by reformers like VT Bhattathiripad, seeking to shake the foundations of Brahmin-ness and 'making Namboothiris human'.[38] From 1929 to 1932, EMS was associated with the reform movement as an editorial assistant at *Unni Namboothiri*

[35]EMS Namboodiripad, "Oru Bhajanathinte Kadha," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 80; Namboodiripad, "Randu Nirahara Samarangal," 154.
[36]EMS Namboodiripad, "Pattanaparishkaram," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 47.
[37]See chapter IV of Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*.
[38] Bhattathiripad is credited with the coining of the slogan "making Namboothiris human". See V T Bhattathiripad, *My Tears, My Dreams*, trans. Sindhu V Nair, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013), xx.

while also being part of marriage sub-committees of the Yuvajana Sangham, picketing *adhivedana* marriages, organising reformist plays and contributing to the legal reform of Namboothiri marriage and family.

The final phase of EMS's association with the Namboothiri reform movement (1933 to late-1940s) also marked its decline. The completion of EMS's jail term in 1933 coincided with his shift from the 'social' realm of Namboothiri community reform to the full-time 'political' struggle for India's freedom. This was when EMS drifted towards socialism and, later, communism. Still, he would be part of organising the first Namboothiri widow remarriage in 1934, thereby inviting *bhrast* from the community.[39] By this time, a significant section of the radical Namboothiri reformers had begun to develop an affinity for left ideas. In this phase, EMS would only associate with the reform movement in a limited manner, mainly by contributing articles to magazines. A significant moment in the history of EMS's association with the Namboothiri reform movement was his keynote address as the chairman of the thirty-fourth annual meeting of the Yogakshema Sabha in 1944 at Ongallur, Palakkad. In this speech, we see EMS foregrounding the concept of 'labour' as an essential means toward the humanisation of Namboothiris. However, the revival efforts did not last long. EMS's association with the movement also ended by the late-1940s.

The following sections will provide an overview of EMS's interventions in the Namboothiri public sphere by analysing his writings from the late-1920s and early-1930s, especially those that appear in *Unni Namboothiri*.

Debating Namboothiri Reform: An Overview of EMS's Writings

In the late-1920s, when EMS became active in the community reform movement, young Namboothiris had been calling for a radical transformation of the community, encapsulated in the well-known slogan of 'humanisation of Namboothiris'. In particular, VT Bhattathiripad had called for the end of the caste-based division of labour and the inculcation of a new consciousness through education that cultivated a life of labour among Namboothiris. An educational system that enables Namboothiris to engage in

[39]EMS Namboodiripad, "Purathuvannapol," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 160.

agriculture, trade and handicraft would aid the demolition of Namboothiriness.[40] While EMS's writings served to propagate these ideas, he also expanded them by bringing concepts and frameworks gained through readings, discussions, and participation in political movements. Gradually, EMS came to negotiate various perspectives within the movement and arrived at a synthesis. There were also occasions when EMS advanced ideas of reform which sometimes contradicted that of his fellow reformers.

EMS's first article was on the topic, titled 'Namboothiris and French Revolution', which appeared in 1927 in a magazine advancing the cause of radical reform called *Pasupatham*. By revolution, EMS meant a 'total transformation' of the community in all aspects of Namboothiri social life.[41] EMS stated that revolution is imminent in the Namboothiri community and equated it with the project of 'humanisation of Namboothiris'.[42] For EMS, humanisation will dismantle the caste edifice that sustained Namboothiris as a community separate from the rest of Keralam and the world. EMS was conscious of the changing social conditions, especially the arrival of capitalism. The community's adaptation to new social conditions was imperative to survive in a modern social order. EMS's writings explicitly carried this agenda of change in the practices of Namboothiris in accordance with the reformist attempts of the time.

Towards the structural and attitudinal transformation of the Namboothiris, EMS advances a three-pronged economic, educational, and ritual reform programme. As part of this, EMS envisages a school imparting five years of residential education in subjects like languages ('working knowledge' of English, Malayalam, Hindi) and 'efficient' knowledge in history, political science, and arithmetic; along with the knowledge of languages and subjects, training in agriculture and technical training will be provided. This will enable students to enter occupations without shame and false pride surrounding Namboothiri distinctiveness. The teachers at this school must be chosen in terms of their openness and wisdom than educational qualifications. By reserving

[40]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 116, 126.
[41]EMS Namboodiripad, "Samudayikaviplavavum Namboothirisamudayavum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 34.
[42]EMS Namboodiripad, "Viplavakahalam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 62.

around fifty per cent of its seats to non-Namboothiri children, chosen irrespective of their caste-community backgrounds, the school would also help promote 'the Harijan cause'.[43]

As his writings indicate, EMS contributed significantly to the debate between the Sabha and the Sangham. A contemporary of VT Bhattathiripad and other revolutionaries who championed the cause of reform of Namboothiri customs, EMS's involvement in the movement saw intense debates about kinship reforms and freedom of Namboothiri women. EMS sharpened his views and articulations on community affairs while working in *Unni Namboothiri*. Through his articles appearing chiefly in *Unni Namboothiri* and other publications, EMS argued for the *uthpathishnu* or progressive cause and addressed the criticisms levelled by 'reactionaries' in *Yogakshemam*. Besides criticisms that defended and clarified the Sangham's positions, EMS actively explained and elaborated his visions for the Namboothiri community. EMS attempted to reconcile various contrasting positions within the broader Namboothiri movement towards a consensus.

EMS criticised the Sabha's working and the various positions advanced by Sabha members in their speeches and articles in *Yogakshemam*. A primary focus of the criticism of the Sabha was its working style. EMS identified 'undemocratic' tendencies, where decisions were taken unilaterally without consultation, especially with those who differed.[44] EMS also voiced the young Namboothiris' criticism of the Sabha's inability to transform agendas into action when he found a gap between 'talk' and 'action' in the *parishakarana* (reform) efforts within the community. According to EMS, community reformers' speeches and newspaper columns were saturated with cries of 'reform' and 'transformation'; but the changes envisaged were not brought into action.[45] That, proposals for reform of customs and measures for self-reliance remained mainly within the Yogakshema Sabha proceedings than being transformed into reality.[46]

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[43]EMS Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimarude Vidyabhyasam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1936-38)*, ed. T Sivadasa Menon, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2006), 25–31.
[44]EMS Namboodiripad, "Gaadalochanayude Phalamo," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 76.
[45]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 58.
[46]Namboodiripad, 'Sabhakalude Ekeekaranam', 153.

However, EMS clarifies that rather than the organisation itself, the criticism he and his peers advanced was more towards the Sabha leadership, who, in his view, lacked firmness of opinion, showed hesitancy and aversion to make sacrifices and make constructive efforts.[47] The leaders of the Sabha did not just lack the strength to initiate new programmes but also exercised great power to create stumbling blocks before the youngsters. The Sabha leaders termed the young Namboothiris as bereft of 'wisdom' and 'courage', and their actions emanated from their sense of 'extreme adventure' and 'shallow intelligence'. 'Reckless', 'imprudent', 'immoral', and 'destructive' were some of the admonishments that 'the wrist-watch bearing conservatives' had hurled at them.[48] Criticising the conservative use of Namboothiri print medium as 'the hurried machinations of the old guard of several Dharmas', EMS stated that the 'failing strength of the old can never defeat the rising strength of the young'.[49] EMS systematically and logically demolished conservative arguments in his articles by pointing out their contradictions and inconsistencies.[50] EMS's arguments showcased his knowledge gained from experience and observations of the everyday problems faced by the Namboothiris.

In the pages of *Unni Namboothiri*, EMS levelled vehement criticisms at the *Yogakshemam* newspaper, which routinely carried articles criticising the Yuvajana Sangham. In an article from April 1930, EMS reviewed a few issues of *Yogakshemam* and described the writings as lacking thought and rigour. In finding fault with the community mouthpiece, EMS sought to define the *dharmam* or essential duties/ functions of the newspaper: 'closely observe the community's mindset, regulate the superficial attitudes of youngsters and reassure the diffident leaders'.[51] *Yogakshemam* was found to have failed in realising each of these duties. Moreover, it antagonised and isolated the youngsters.[52] EMS criticised the newspaper for its many silences on crucial issues, such as the Namboothiri Bill. EMS regarded such omissions as a sign that *Yogakshemam* failed to represent community interests.[53] Here, EMS's interventions

[47]Namboodiripad, 154.
[48]Namboodiripad, 154.
[49]Namboodiripad, "Samudayikaviplavavum Namboothirisamudayavum," 36–37.
[50]Namboodiripad, "Gaadalochanayude Phalamo."
[51]Namboodiripad, 76.
[52]Namboodiripad, 77.
[53]EMS Namboodiripad, "Uzhalunnathinte Uthama Mathruka," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 123–24.

were underlined by his idea of the fundamental purpose of the public sphere. In an article he wrote in the college magazine, EMS considered the power of freedom of expression ('the freedom to make speeches and write') as valuable and that 'public platforms' such as newspapers can be used to keep the powerful accountable to people.[54] EMS's statement about the need for an independent press for the Sangham and its publication *Unni Namboothiri* must be read in this context.[55]

EMS's interventions in the Namboothiri public sphere in the early-twentieth century were also marked by negotiations and interlocutions. This took the form of reconciling competing schools of thought within the Namboothiri reform programme and blending new struggles and ideologies into the *parishkaranam* project. In 1929, EMS welcomed the increasing number of organisations within the community and even proposed the formation of a new revolutionary organisation.[56] EMS considered the possibility of the rising number of organisations within the community being interpreted as an indication of disunity. However, for EMS, the diversity and increasing number of collectivities within the Namboothiri movement indicated the presence of a strong consensus on the need for eradicating *abhijathyam* (the sense of Namboothiri pride).[57] By 1933, EMS argued that the need for the separate existence of the Sabha and Sangham was over. He called for the *ekeekaranam* (unification) of the different Sabhas and causes.[58] At this point, EMS clarified that than Sabha per se, the object of the Sangham's criticisms in the past was the leadership of the Sabha. The Sangham's role was that of a catalyst for achieving the objectives of the Sabha, which its leadership was unenthusiastic about.[59] Here, EMS was attempting to legitimise the contentions posed by the Sangham as within the goals and ideals envisaged by the Sabha.

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[54]EMS Namboodiripad, "Natturajyangal - Rashtreeyakkarkkoru Prashnam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 129.
[55]EMS Namboodiripad, "Yuvajana Sanghathinu Oru Swantham Press," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 125–26.
[56]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 60.
[57]Namboodiripad, 61.
[58]Namboodiripad, "Sabhakalude Ekeekaranam," 154.
[59]Namboodiripad, 154.

Apart from the call for the literal unification of the diverse groups within the community, EMS sought to align competing schools of thought in the Sabha, although he had aligned with and championed the cause of the Yuvajana Sangham earlier. EMS's attempts to develop consensus were under the larger rubric of the revolutionary project of 'humanising Namboothiris'. In the Peramangalam annual Sabha meeting in 1934, a polarising debate happened with respect to the reform programme to be adopted. One section argued that the Sabha should engage in 'constructive' economic and educational transformation activities than the reform of customs. Another section, especially those under VT Bhattathiripad, argued for *aachaara parishkaranam* or the reform of Namboothiri customs. EMS's intervention was to locate the Namboothiri reform movement as part of the broader social-political-economic revolutionary programme of the country and Keralam, a move that accommodated both constructive activities and the reform of Namboothiri customs.[60]

EMS tried to assimilate the radical Namboothiri reform movement ('humanisation') as part of the struggle for a casteless, united Keralam. Here, EMS linked the humanising project with subaltern, anti-caste struggles in Kerala waged by philosopher Sree Narayana Guru, poet Kumaranasan, TK Madhavan and others.[61] EMS took a leading role in formulating a four-point agenda in a meeting convened at Olappamanna in 1934: cooperation of Namboothiris with other communities in realising Aikya Keralam, reform of Namboothiri customs, cooperation with Harijan upliftment programmes, including struggles for temple entry and the merging of Yuvajana Sangham and YogakshemaSabha.[62]

We see EMS assimilating concepts and ideas such as 'humanism', 'democracy' and 'labour' in the context of the Namboothiri public sphere. The idea of the universal human was important for EMS. EMS envisioned the cultivation/ nurturance of the idea of humanity among the Namboothiri community in practical, strategic, and other possible ways. EMS based his ideas on an existing imagination that came along with the reform activities of the early-twentieth century Keralam from European thought

[60]Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimar Manushyarakan," 271–72.
[61]Namboodiripad, 299.
[62]EMS Namboodiripad, "Prasthavana," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 167–68.

traditions and debates. For EMS, being human meant becoming eligible to live a life of labour (than the idleness and decadence that Namboothiris were known for), away from the restraints of caste. With the experiences gained from the active interventions within the community, EMS was slowly getting connected to a larger political milieu that worked on a radical understanding and recognition of universal humanity.

This idea of the human and humanity provided the intellectual basis for EMS to present the concept of democracy to the Namboothiri public. EMS argued that the fundamental human impulse for socialisation generated diverse forms of organisation such as race, clan, lineage, nation, and community. However, EMS viewed democracy as a universal form of socialisation with certain 'core principles' based on humanistic values. Such a principle of social organisation cut through time, applying to 'the ancient sages who renounced the world', 'the modern man who has gained control of nature' or 'the uncivilised negro'.[63] In a democracy, the power to decide on things affecting the society/ community is given to the society/ community, yet every individual is entitled to have his own opinions on this societal power.[64] Compared to other forms of social organisation, such as monarchy and aristocracy, democracy brings prosperity to the human community. Although democracy can become corrupt by transforming into mobocracy, corrective measures could be undertaken. For EMS, democracy was an organisation that accorded with human nature. Furthermore, EMS exhorted readers to set aside individual/ community/ political differences and support democratic movements like the League of Nations and the Kellog Pact.[65]

EMS applied the concept of democracy in his prescriptions for community reform. For example, EMS invoked democracy in his response to an accusation that the Namboothiri Yuvajana Sangham was driving the noblemen of the community away. Accordingly, EMS argued that in community reform, aristocratic norms did not have much space; instead of their interests, the interests of the rank and file must be

[63]EMS Namboodiripad, "Manavasamudayathile Janaadhipathyabharanam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 69.
[64]Namboodiripad, 70.
[65]Namboodiripad, 'Manavasamudayathile Janaadhipathyabharanam'.

prioritised.[66] EMS also criticised the highhandedness of the Sabha as 'against the interests of the majority', evidently, an undemocratic tendency.[67] EMS's idea of *samudayam* went beyond the limited ideas of community to encompass the expansive idea of the human. At the same time, the community was the starting point of the transformation. EMS envisioned that Kerala's social status quo should undergo a transformation and start from respective communities.[68]

As the analysis of his autobiographical writings indicates, EMS had come to be critical of his caste inheritances by the late-1920s. This was the juncture in which EMS became active in the reform movement by identifying especially with the cause of radical reform that implied the de-casteing of Namboothiris through 'humanisation'. It was also when EMS had come under the sway of Gandhian nationalism and became conscious of its anti-caste implications. These intellectual influences, combined with the abstract idea of revolution that appealed to EMS, would produce a critique of caste — the 'Namboothirithvam' (Namboothiriness) and 'Brahmanyam' (Brahminness)—that he proposed in his writings from the late-1920s to the 1940s. These writings argued for the need for the Namboothiri community to end its caste-based social isolation and become integrated into modern Kerala society.

What were the effects of these interventions in terms of fashioning a distinct Namboothiri subjectivity? Can the writings be seen as 'experiential narratives' embodying EMS's desubjectivation process? To understand EMS's visions for Namboothiri community reform from a desubjectivation point of view, let us examine the particulars of his critique of caste.

Reform and Desubjectivation of Caste

EMS's idea of reform of Namboothiris connoted a process that was as much internal as it was external to the community. EMS envisioned radical transitions in Namboothiri life to be materialised within the community and a simultaneous process of aligning with the anti-caste reform interventions happening in other communities. These processes

[66]EMS Namboodiripad, "Namboothirisamudayathinte Innathe Nila," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 83.
[67]Namboodiripad, "Gaadalochanayude Phalamo," 76.
[68]Namboodiripad, "Samudayikaviplavavum Namboothirisamudayavum."

would ideally culminate in the formation of a casteless, United Kerala. EMS considered caste a stumbling block for the progress of the Namboothiri community and the nation. EMS's reformist writings, therefore, placed a heavy emphasis on the dismantlement of caste. Like most other second-generation reformers, EMS sought to critique Sabha for its reluctance to interfere with the core attributes of Namboothiri culture. For example, Yogakshema Sabha, in its earliest stages, prohibited its members from speaking, acting, or making any decisions that would contravene the *aacharam* (traditions), *nadapadi*(customs) and the systems of *aabhijathyam* of Namboothiris.[69] EMS would address this resistance and propose many strategies that were in effect aimed at the desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self and forming a new, casteless, equal, liberated human subjectivity.

In arguing for 'internal' reform, EMS first identified the meaning and features of Namboothirithvam (Namboothiriness). In EMS's analysis, Namboothiriness emerged from certain *prathyekathakal* or unique features. The uniqueness was determined by the caste division of labour. Accordingly, each caste is distinguished by the occupations/ professions (*pravarthi*) assigned to it. As one caste community could not enter the profession of the other, each community developed its own 'culture' (*samskaram*). The community-specific culture and occupation/ profession constitutes *prathyekatha*.[70] The Namboothiri uniqueness, traditionally, was constituted by their archaic mode of instruction, a philosophical bent of mind peculiar to Namboothiris and the high status accorded to them by other communities. However, EMS observed that in contemporary Kerala society, Namboothiris understood their uniqueness with a set of *anacharams*.[71] These included the *adhivedana* marriage system, the unpartitioned, joint family system and *jenmithvam* (landlordism).[72]

Having defined the elements of Namboothirithvam, EMS argues the need for dismantling it. The unique patterns and modes of life constituting Namboothirithvam

[69]Cited in Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 102.
[70]EMS Namboodiripad, "Namboothirisamudayavum Prathyekathayum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 44.
[71] Anacharam referred to those *acharams* (traditions/ customs) that did not exist in other places. See T. C. Parameshwaran Moosathu, *Sankarasmrithi (Laghu Dharma Prakasika)* (Thrissur: Bharatha Vilasam Press, 1906).
[72]Namboodiripad, 'Namboothirisamudayavum Prathyekathayum', 44.

were made possible by the other castes, who occupied their respective place in the caste system.[73] These traditional patterns and modes of Namboothiri life, dependent on the functioning of castes with their assigned positions, roles, and occupations, were no longer viable. For, castes were actively unlinking themselves from the system through various forms of resistance, religious conversion, and anti-untouchability movements. Keralam was in the throes of a fight against the monster of caste. Furthermore, while Brahmins in other parts of India are extricating themselves from caste, by their refusal to do so, Namboothiris remained an isolated community in Kerala society. Besides, the *adhivedana* marriage deteriorated Namboothiri persons; the joint family system stifled freedom; and landlordism, although crumbling, created an aversion for labour among Namboothiris. In this regard, by their staunch adherence to *prathyekatha*, Namboothiris were on the way to their eventual decline.

Next, EMS proposed the modes of the dismantling of Namboothirithvam and the place of the reform movement in it. EMS believed that Namboothiriness must be demolished through a programme involving several strategies. The first strategy was modernisation, or what was termed by Namboothiri reformers as 'constructive activities'. This included modern education (for both men and women), legal reform of the traditional joint Namboothiri family structure and Namboothiri marriage practices, internalisation of rational attitudes, and reducing unnecessary expenses on rituals. EMS advised the young Namboothiris to imbibe rationality and give up superstitious attitudes.[74] The community should decide that their rituals should be kept as simple proceedings, and unnecessary expenses should not be made for these rituals and everyday practices.[75] Changes in the Namboothiri joint family system must be effected by reforming property relations, marriage practices and kinship structures.[76] In marriage reform, while the reformist espousal of *swajaatheeya vivaham* (intra-community/ endogamous marriages) was a strategic means to an end, a temporary solution to the problem of the increased number of unwed young Namboothiri women, the ultimate

[73]Namboodiripad, 45.
[74]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 58.
[75]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 288–89.
[76]Namboodiripad, 'Namboothirisamudayavum Prathyekathayum', 44.

goal was inter-caste marriage.[77] EMS considered that the time was ripe for Namboothiri community members to leave their caste pride and realise that they were on the verge of pauperisation.[78] And a life of labour, even those ritually prohibited for Brahmins, such as scavenging, was preferable over the dishonourable image of the decadent, idle, pre-modern Namboothiri.[79]

However, EMS found that constructive activities per se could not demolish Namboothiriness and Brahminness. EMS argued that, often, sections among Namboothiris may champion reform measures such as modern education, *swajatheeya vivaham* and legal reforms while still abiding by their affinity for *mamool* (customs/ traditions). Support for such ostensibly progressive causes, rooted in self-interest, concealed their intrinsic conservatism. Such an approach reinforced Namboothiriness than transformed Namboothiris into humans. In other words, constructive activities may not necessarily translate to reform in their essence. The actual test of commitment to the demolition of Namboothirithvam was, therefore, de-ritualisation, the repudiation of *aacharam*, and *aabhijathyam*.

According to EMS, a Namboothiri could only recount the deplorable customs prevalent in his community with humiliation.[80] Examples include *yagams* (rites) involving animal sacrifice and consumption of sacrificial meat, which he termed 'diabolic' and 'violent', or expensive ritual practices such as *thanams* which he described as 'decadent'.[81] *Achara bahishkaranam* or de-ritualisation facilitated the defiance of priestly injunctions and, ultimately, *vaidika uchadanam* or the elimination of priestly authority.[82] EMS exhorted Namboothiri youth to actively challenge and provoke priestly authority through everyday acts of transgression. EMS proposed the formation of a 'revolutionary organisation' (Namboothiri Revolutionary Organisation) with the stated

[77]EMS Namboodiripad, "Samudayika Parishkaranathinte Prasakthi," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 149.
[78]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 289.
[79]Namboodiripad, 286.
[80]Namboodiripad, "Samudayikaviplavavum Namboothirisamudayavum," 36.
[81]EMS Namboodiripad, "Himsaparamaya Yagam adhava Paishaachikayajnam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 52.
[82]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 58, 62.

aims of 'demolition of *aacharam* and establishment of freedom' for the same.[83] In short, for EMS, modernisation without de-ritualisation was not helpful.

EMS, therefore, proposed that constructive activities ensure the effective inclusion of the de-ritualisation component in them. For example, an ideal curriculum for Namboothiri children must not include anything that inculcates religiosity or asceticism. Namboothiri children should be educated in public schools, which was most effective in breaking the notion of Namboothiri uniqueness. If hostels for Namboothiri children are set up near public schools, they can provide training in physical activities and vocational training, creating an inclination for earning their livelihood through work. Should children from other castes be allowed in the hostels, Namboothiri children will shed their narrow-mindedness. In short, education aimed to dispel Namboothiriness would cultivate a consciousness in Namboothiri children that they live and must live in a modern world.

By the mid-1930s, the series of transformations within the community had created a perception among the radical Namboothiri reformers of the redundancy of community activism. In this view, factors like modern education had become accessible to Namboothiri children, including girls; legislations had resulted in changes in inheritance structure and the establishment of nuclear families. There was a general transition in the Namboothiri lifestyle, who had begun to leave a life of idleness and enter the modern workforce. With such changes unleashed, the reformers imagined that differences between castes were fast disappearing. In this context, reformers began to think of working for a new, casteless social order that would address the concerns of all castes and not just Namboothiris.[84] This shift in thought took a concrete form in the interventions of VT Bhattathiripad, who resigned from community activism. In his later life, VT organised inter-caste marriages, established (although unsuccessfully) the 'UdbudhaKeralam' *ashram* as a multi-caste commune and engaged

[83]Namboodiripad, 60.
[84]EMS Namboodiripad, "Samudaya Pravarthanathinte Avasanaghattam," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 165.

in awareness activities against caste and superstitions.[85] However, EMS would move in a different direction.

Although various social changes had become possible, EMS was not convinced that the need for an organised movement for Namboothiri community reform was over.[86] For one, EMS believed that the fruits of a quarter century's community reform activism had impacted only a tiny fraction of the community. EMS believed that the internal reforms aimed at the transition in mentality, everyday habits, and the social structure of Namboothiris must be complemented by active efforts to end the social isolation of the community. Already, EMS was particular about the merging of Namboothiri self with the larger society, be it in terms of an educational programme he drew up[87] or his stance in favour of replacing Sanskrit terms with Malayalam, the spoken language of Kerala.[88] More importantly for EMS was the idea that the Namboothiri reform movement must exchange and collaborate with other communities and community organisations. Progress could be achieved only if the Namboothiris transcended their Brahminism by abandoning caste pride and lived like any other citizen in a United Kerala with equality and freedom. To meet this objective, a 'common programme' must be drawn up[89] that aids the transition from a Namboothiri Revolutionary Organisation to an All-Kerala Revolutionary Association where Namboothiris can play significant roles.[90] These efforts would culminate in a United Kerala where Malayalees live as equal, casteless citizens.

While proposing the common programme, EMS was nevertheless conscious that each community held different priorities for reform. For example, EMS staunchly opposed the concept of reservation for Namboothiris in employment. According to EMS, reservation is helpful only in cases where individuals face discrimination because of their membership in a particular community. EMS stated that, unlike Ezhavas or Muslims, a *savarna* Hindu community like Namboothiris did not face any significant

[85]Namboodiripad, 165–66.
[86]Namboodiripad, 166.
[87]Namboodiripad, 'Namboothirimarude Vidyabhyasam'.
[88]P Govinda Pillai, "Avatharika," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 20.
[89]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 309.
[90]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 64.

disability under *savarna* power and therefore did not need any special political representation.[91] In calling for a united front of anti-caste movements that contributed to the formation of a casteless Aikya Keralam, EMS conceptualised an abstract, casteless citizen of Kerala as the solution to caste-ridden, Malayali population spread over Malabar, Cochin and Travancore.

In the early stages of his association with the reform movement, EMS imagined the transition of a Namboothiri subjectivity and the moulding of an abstract, de-ritualised, modern subjectivity that will constitute United Kerala. With EMS's shift towards left ideology, his idea of the reform of Namboothiris and the utopian casteless future was shaped by the framework of class politics. In his keynote address titled 'Towards Making Namboothiris Human' at the 1944 Ongallur convention of the Yogakshema Sabha and thereafter in a 1947 article, EMS developed the idea of caste from a more explicitly Marxist standpoint. Accordingly, the Namboothiri community was characterised by the twin burden of *janmithvam*/ landlordism (the economic structure) and *brahmanyam* (the ideological superstructure). The reform movement must demolish *jenmithvam* (landlordism) in addition to their Namboothiriness/ Brahminness. Towards this aim, EMS argued that Namboothiris must shed their idleness and become part of the working class, either as peasants or as workers. The labouring, casteless human became the ideal.

In conceptualising a lifestyle of labour for Namboothiris,[92] EMS imagined that both men and women must learn to work in modern settings like factories, harbours, industries and workshops; and acquire knowledge of new trades by travelling to foreign countries. They should return to their country and set up similar establishments.[93] Through labour or *adhvanam*, Namboothiri must shed their idleness and engage in agriculture, factory work and entrepreneurial efforts. Participation in the modern workforce will necessitate Namboothiris to renounce the observance of ritual purity and the attendant notions of *aabhijathyam*, i.e., Namboothiri superiority and

[91] E M S Namboodiripad, 'Namboothirimarum Pratyeka Prathinidhyavum', in *E M Sinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 172; Namboodiripad, 'Namboothirimar Manushyarakan', 301–2, 304–5.
[92] Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 286–87.
[93] Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimar Manushyarakan," 288.

distinctiveness.[94] The labouring Namboothiri was the antidote to the caste-ridden, idle Namboothiri, the symbol of decadence. Being labourers allowed Namboothiris to give up their caste pride and merge with the rest of the human society as peasants and factory workers.

In the 1944 speech, EMS identified the possibility of class struggle in the community by categorising two sets of Namboothiris with opposing interests: (1) the landed, feudal Namboothiri *jenmi* and (2) the non-*jenmi*, poorer peasant Namboothiri class. In EMS's estimation, the partition of property facilitated by legal reforms had resulted in class formation among Namboothiris, and the number of Namboothiri peasants will rise by two or three-fold in a decade. EMS claimed that Namboothiris, who identified with the latter class, was already high.[95] Because of the opposing class interests of the proletarian and *jenmi* Namboothiris, the proletarians should become part of the larger working-class movement. The new, labouring Namboothiri subject, working in fields, factories and other modern occupational settings, would join the emerging proletariat. Here, EMS imagined a transformed Namboothiri self, sequestered from a ritual setting and re-formed into a labouring human with class interests.

In EMS's imagination, the transition of Namboothiri self accounted for its complete replacement by an ostensibly modern subjecthood — be it the relatively vague conceptualisation of a revolutionary subjectivity that culminates in the formation of United Kerala he advances in the late-1920s and the 1930s or the proletarian subjectivity he proposes in the 1940s. In both cases, EMS thinks that an abstract identity of the Universal Hu(man) can transform caste. However, the caste critique inherent in EMS's perspective, for all its radical implications for community reform, was limited on many counts and did not entirely imply desubjectivation from a caste self to a casteless one. I will analyse this aspect using Aditya Nigam's idea of 'secularised caste'. While the shift in worldviews represents a departure, the idea of the 'universal human' also allows the continuities of Brahmin social power.

[94]Namboodiripad, "Namboothirisamudayavum Prathyekathayum"; Namboodiripad, "Viplavakahalam," 61.
[95]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 303.

'Protean Self' and the Limits to Desubjectivation

Nigam's analysis of the secularisation of caste provides a different angle for understanding EMS's intellectual manoeuvres in the Namboothiri community public. Nigam draws on Periyar's writings to conceptualise what he calls the 'protean Brahmin self', the process wherein Brahmins become malleable and adaptive in the secular realm of the modern world while still retaining caste power. Nigam argues that even as they remained Brahmins, many believed in the need for the modernisation of 'Hindu' society, especially that it be 'freed of the blot of caste distinctions'.[96]The presence of the old and the new in the Brahmin is related to the peculiar nature of the formation of the protean Brahmin self:

> It was not as if the processes of modernity ushered in by the colonial encounter were simply destroying the hold of caste hierarchies and bringing in the new world of modern development, industrialisation and a regime of rights and citizenship. Rather, the old was 'always already' present in the new but no longer in the old form.[97]

The breakdown of the old order and the emergence of this new, hybrid modernity was thus a simultaneous process. According to Nigam, while adapting to modernity, the Brahmins and other caste elites do not relinquish their new and emerging power in the secular realm.[98] Here, Nigam brings in Kancha Illiah, who spoke of how feudal Brahmins achieved power by selling their landed properties, migrating to urban centres, becoming middle class, and controlling the state sector through their command of the English language.[99]

It can be said that the critique advanced by the second generation of 'progressive' Namboothiri reformers' (the mid-1920s to early-1930s) acknowledged this contradiction of modernity and even critiqued it. They had criticised 'conservatives' for their selective openness to modernisation, i.e., the willingness to accept only those elements of modernity that augmented/ preserved the power of Namboothiris. In his autobiography, EMS interprets the emergence of the Yogakshema Sabha ostensibly to

[96]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', December 2000, 4261.
[97]Nigam, 4262.
[98]Nigam, 4261.
[99]Nigam, 4260.

defend *jenmi* interests in the backdrop of the strengthening tenancy movement in Malabar.[100] In this regard, EMS's critique of the section within Namboothiris who conceal their affinity for customs and traditions with their openness to certain types of reforms anticipated the critique of the protean self to some extent. Here, EMS proposed the desubjectivation of Namboothiriness by rejecting rituality in everyday life.

However, in the new order, rather than ritual superiority, their amenability to modernisation had conferred power to Brahmins.[101] In rejecting rituality and imagining modified Namboothiri selves that seamlessly merged into a casteless utopian Kerala, EMS failed to realise that caste power already gives Brahmins certain advantages over other castes in the modern world. EMS did not understand how Brahmins could retain and lay claim to power in a perfectly secular world as ritualised or de-ritualised selves. Instead, EMS reduces Namboothiriness to rituality and that once ritualism gives way to a modernised, secularised social order, caste will disappear. In other words, the working of a secularised caste escapes EMS's analytical gaze.

At the same time, EMS also argued that the Namboothiri resistance to modernity would be detrimental to the community. Radical reform was presented in his writings as a practical question:

> Any intelligent person can perceive that the landlords are a sinking group. Long ago, the landlord was the commanding, wealthy and influential figure; he was capable of reining in ordinary people and influencing the authorities; no one else owned as many assets and income. …Today, traders, planters and entrepreneurs… earn more... Hence, if the high status enjoyed by landlords in earlier times is to be maintained, they must realise that it is trade, industry and modernised, large-scale agriculture that regulates the structure of the financial system today; the money spent to buy up lands which give four or five *paras* of rice as rent should be utilised to invest in trade and industry.[102]

Here, EMS's concern seems to be the preservation of Namboothiri social power, contradicting his stated commitment to the cause of a casteless society. EMS invoked

[100]EMS Namboodiripad, "Puthiya Chalanangal," in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 36.
[101]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', December 2000, 4262.
[102]Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimar Manushyarakan," 292.

the figure of the 'foolish Namboothiri' that had been used to ridicule the community's resistance to modernity.[103] EMS recalls that at school, his Thiyya and Nair classmates used to look down on Namboothiris and mocked them at any given opportunity.[104] Community pride and shame seemed to have concerned EMS to a great extent. EMS was already aware of the futility of adhering to the conservative idea of Namboothiri *prathyekatha*. In addition to economic changes and the rise of new economic forces mentioned above, a significant reason for EMS's awareness of the need for adaptation was the active challenging of caste by contemporary anti-caste movements. EMS stated that even if a minuscule sub-caste chooses to convert to another religion, vow to enter into non-cooperation or liberates itself through eradicating untouchability, the Namboothiris will not be able to survive. In other words, he was aware of the power the subaltern communities were gaining in the new public.

Against the background of assertion of lower castes, EMS called for radical community transformation. We see, for example, that EMS contrasted the contemporary situation of the community with the progress achieved by other communities, which are ritually of lower status than the Namboothiris.

> When the boys and girls of other communities get educated in schools and colleges, why do our boys, while away time chanting or not chanting Vedas and girls, remain more illiterate than Harijan children? Because of our Brahmin mindset. When the adult women and men from other communities live life either married or unmarried, either working or begging if they do not get work, why do our women and men lead such an unhappy life?[105]

EMS is clear that the traditional form of authority hitherto enjoyed was not practical anymore, yet Namboothiris can retain significant power by acquiring the secular ways of being in the modern world. For example, in criticising the approach of Yogakshema Sabha, EMS argued that instead of aiming for 'a Namboothiri parliament that rules India, we must aim for an Indian Parliament that governs India and Namboothiris occupying a not-so-small part in it'.[106] EMS also stated that Namboothiris could play leadership roles

[103]Namboodiripad, 291–92.
[104]EMS Namboodiripad, "Vidyabhyasam: Schoolilum Purathum," in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 35.
[105]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 290.
[106]Namboodiripad, 'Viplavakahalam', 60.

in Kerala's emerging casteless, utopian future.[107] Moreover, when EMS's left ideological inclinations became criticised in the community movement, he defended his critique of the twin problem of the *brahmanyam* (Brahmin-ness) and landlordism as follows:

> It is not to liberate non-brahmins and lower castes from brahmin domination that I exhort you to discard our *brahmanyam* (if that were so, I would have approached non-brahmins and other lower castes and not you; I would have organised them against *brahmanyam*). The brahminical mindset of the Namboothiri harms himself more than the lower castes; the continuation of this outlook is at our peril – I have realised this and have come to you to convince the same.[108]

Similarly,

> It is not to liberate peasants from feudalism that I ask to change our feudal mindset (if that were so, I would have approached the peasants and not you). I request you to throw away feudal attitudes because your idea that you are the landlords and that your salvation lies in feudalism only serves to obliterate Namboothiris.[109]

EMS was asking for destroying just the 'sufficient amount' of *brahmanyam* (and feudalism)[110] that enables the community to flourish in the modern world.

At this point, we must consider that EMS's idea of 'Hindu' spirituality had been conditioned by the literature he was exposed to from the time he was able to read newspapers. As we saw in chapter II, this idea of the Hindu self had been conditioned by different intellectual projects, Orientalism being the most significant. Such influences had shaped EMS's understandings of his cultural inheritances, especially discourses surrounding the idea of 'Hinduism' and caste. EMS's early writings evidence this in the Namboothiri public, which touched upon the theme of the 'fall' of Namboothiris, 'Hindus' and the 'Parasurama Kshethram'.[111] EMS would interpret practices of animal sacrifice as evidence of the deterioration of the Namboothiri community, which once

[107]Namboodiripad, 64.
[108]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 290.
[109]Namboodiripad, 292.
[110]Namboodiripad, 292.
[111]Namboodiripad, 'Samudayikaviplavavum Namboothirisamudayavum', 36; Namboodiripad, 'Himsaparamaya Yagam', 52.

had been blessed by the birth of Sankaracharya.[112] Although later, EMS would shift his position of raising the Namboothiri community from the supposed 'fall' and would argue for a merging of the Brahmin self into a casteless society. We see EMS calling to end the social isolation of the Namboothiri community by engaging with other caste-communities. EMS argues in favour of inter-caste marriages and giving up privileges such as reservations for the community in employment and other state benefits.[113] According to him, progress can be achieved only if the Namboothiris transcended their Namboothiriness and Brahminism by abandoning their sense of *abhijathyam* and becoming humans.

It is possible that framing reform as a practical and contingent question of survival was a tactic of persuasion aimed at cajoling 'conservatives' to the reform position. This is because EMS was of the hope that once modernity is ushered in, hierarchies will crumble, and Namboothiriness will not have a place in the reformed order. In changed circumstances, the modernised Namboothiri would change his mentality and become casteless. In fact, EMS claimed in his self-narratives to have undergone 'de-classification', to have achieved desubjectivation from his Namboothiri self. However, caste power, rather than withering, assumed another shape. Reform in that sense was more of resubjectivation than desubjectivation.

To understand EMS's seemingly contradictory concern for the community and the call for transcending Namboothiri identity, let us return to Aditya Nigam's analysis of the Dalit critique of modern universalism. Accordingly, a critical factor that gives power to the malleable Brahmin self in the modern, secular realm is the ideology of universalism. Nigam illustrates this point through his example of Brahmin/ upper-caste Marxist employment of the idea of universal human and, specifically, Dilip Menon's study of EMS's history writing. However, we can see the employment of the universal

[112]Namboodiripad, "Himsaparamaya Yagam," 52. Later in his life, EMS would analyse Sankara's philosophy as anti-god and anti-ritualistic in nature. According to EMS, Sankara foregrounded the concept of *brahmam* and characterised every other aspect of existence as maya or illusion. For EMS, *brahmam* subsumed the concept of god. Thus, god was an illusion as well. If god was an illusion, rituals, customary practices and prayers were futile. EMS pointed out that the anti-ritualist position within Adi Sankara's philosophy invited opposition from the conventionally religious Brahmins of the time. See E M S Namboodiripad, "Bhouthikavaadathinte Sadhyatha Theliyicha Shankaradarshanam," in *Darsanatheppatti*, 2nd ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2013), 33.
[113]Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimar Manushyarakan," 301–2, 304–5.

human even before EMS engages with Marxism in his very interventions in the community public. This idea of universalism had reached EMS through colonial education and the Enlightenment ideals that had influenced the larger social reform movements in Kerala in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. According to Nigam, universalism is a specific trajectory of modernity; the Universal Man is 'embodied in the abstract citizen, unmarked by any identity. This project was meant to be achieved by erasing and repressing particular identities.'[114] Nigam says that,

> The modern individuated self inhabits the ground of high modernity in India — the ground of civil society, governed by modern notions of citizenship and defined by contractual relations and rules of free entry and exit. Equality, autonomy, deliberative procedures of decision-making are the values that underlie the functioning of the institutions that constitute it.[115]

However, the standardising and homogenising tendency of the Universal Man often tends to present the dominant culture as the norm by blocking 'the subversive deployments of its own discourses of rights and equality.'[116] Thus, a malleable Brahmin self emerges in the modern. The ideology of universalism conceived in the casteless, (hu)man citizen of Keralam and India is what gives mobility and enhancement to this self. On the outside, this conceptualisation takes everyone on board but is oblivious to social divisions in society and the possibilities offered by the subaltern critiques of those social divisions, especially the existing emancipatory ideologies of the global south; thus, enabling the domination of traditional elites in particular ways. Through such deliberations, caste gets modified and secularised in the modern world. EMS's intellectual moves on 'humanising Namboothiri' can be seen as an act of secularising caste achieved through the idea of universal man introduced in the Namboothiri community, even before the Marxist category of class became available to him. At the same time, a strict separation of EMS's intellectual frames into pre-Marxist and Marxist universalism is impossible. This was not only because the Marxist universal category is a product of the universalism of European Enlightenment streams of thought that came to EMS through his engagement with the larger social reform movement. It is also

[114]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', December 2000, 4258.
[115]Nigam, 4266.
[116]Nigam, 4263.

because EMS had encountered the left ideology in his Namboothiri activism phase. As EMS became initiated into Marxist thought, he applied that to understand the Namboothiri community and analyse its problems.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, we saw how the modern worked in the Brahmin community through the institutionalisation of caste structures. Though EMS characterised the phenomena as 'pre-modern', we analysed how the Namboothiri Brahmins articulated their caste locations in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries using modern categories. This allows us to see how EMS understood the idea of modern and pre-modern as categories of analysis. This chapter has shown that in EMS's understandings, the modern facilitated the making of individuated selves fashioned after an abstract citizen.

Modern Namboothiri publics and print mediums that discussed orthodoxy and rigid rituals emerged from the early twentieth century, and EMS was part of it. However, EMS also envisioned a new arrangement where the ideas propagated as reform agendas could be implemented. EMS identified a divide between everyday life on the one hand and the inefficiency of the inherited organisation's ability to translate ideas into practice on the other. Hence, EMS called on the young generation of Namboothiris to recall their pasts and make the orthodox uncomfortable. Through his criticism of the Yogakshema Sabha and conservative positions, EMS proposed agendas and demands to make the Namboothiri orient towards progressive ideas. EMS addressed the community's 'general conservative mentality' and initiated internal debates on specific issues and decisions. It showed how he intervened in debates to create opinions on community affairs.[117]

One could see that EMS was, in a way, replacing the old models of Sabha's agendas from its initial years in a new frame and calling it 'human'. In EMS's view, the individuated Namboothiri was beginning to detach himself from the Brahminical category, in the process, achieving desubjectivation. EMS assumed that an abstract

[117]Namboodiripad, "Namboothirisamudayathinte Innathe Nila."

identity of the Universal Hu(man) could transform caste – be it the Malayali citizen of the Aikya Keralam he imagined in his early-reform phase or the proletarian self he imagined later as a Marxist intellectual. However, the adaptable and malleable abstract human self sometimes facilitates the resubjectivation of a Brahmin self, thereby revealing the limits of the desubjectivation process foregrounded by EMS. In other words, while focusing on de-ritualisation as a means of desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self, EMS was oblivious to the working of 'secularised caste'. The revolutionary interventions of EMS and other reformers, while enabling the community to adapt to the new social order, thus also sought to maintain the hegemonic hold over caste power. Aditya Nigam has argued that the category of the Universal Man comes to existence by erasing and repressing particular identities. In this process of standardisation and homogenisation, the Universal Hu(man) often presents the dominant culture as the norm. As a result, the potential for the subversive deployments of its own discourses of rights and equality' is blocked. I will try to show this in EMS's engagements with peasants and the process of peasant mobilisation. The idea of 'secularised caste' enables one to understand the 'powerful after-life' of upper caste power, which, rather than through the old language of caste – and in our case, in opposition to it -is articulated through the new language of the secular discourse.[118]

EMS's idea of the universal human, central to the desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self, would act as the prelude to EMS's interventions in the left public. In the next chapter, we assess EMS's contributions within the qualitatively different public, that of the peasants, emerging in Malabar. We see EMS using the idea of the universal human, abstracted into a desubjectivised, working-class self, in his intellectual interventions in the peasant-agrarian context. One of the questions examined in the chapter is the continuities and discontinuities between EMS's interventions in the Namboothiri public sphere and the left peasant public.

[118]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', December 2000, 4268.

Chapter IV.

INTELLECTUAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE LEFT PUBLIC SPHERE: UNIVERSAL HU(MAN) AND THE QUESTION OF PEASANTS IN MALABAR

In the pantheon of left political leaders in Kerala, EMS enjoys a prime place as a 'thinker' and 'revolutionary intellectual' who shaped the left political direction in pre- and post-independence India[1] EMS was a prolific writer, leaving behind a vast corpus of writings on subjects ranging from 'philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, history, economics, politics and more'.[2] Against the large canvas of left politics in Kerala and the vast oeuvre of EMS within it, this chapter focuses on the specific arena of peasant mobilisation by the Communist Party of Kerala and EMS's role in it. EMS had been an organiser of the peasant movements in Malabar between the 1930s and 1940s, including the Karshaka Sanghams (Peasant Unions). The peasant mobilisations of the late-1930s and 1940s had cemented the foundations of the Communist Party in Malabar. EMS engaged with the peasant question through his writings on land relations, agrarian transformation, peasant movements and, most crucially, the question of land reform. EMS is credited with providing the theoretical basis for the radical peasant movement in Malabar and the land reform policies between 1957 and 1971 that abolished landlordism,[3] making Kerala the first state in India to do so. This chapter will try to understand EMS's interventions in the left public sphere in Kerala by analysing his writings on peasants and the agrarian question in Malabar between 1935 and 1949.

The 1935 article, *Malabarile Krishikkar* (The Peasants of Malabar), which reportedly marked EMS as a 'working-class leader' for the first time, called for a 'total

[1]I. S. Gulati and T. M. Thomas Isaac, "EMS Namboodiripad: Revolutionary Intellectual," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 13 (1998): 689; In fact, EMS considered himself as a "budhijeevi" (intellectual) in contrast to an "organiser" like P. Krishna Pillai. See EMS Namboodiripad, "Saghavum Njanum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1954 Dec- 1956 Nov)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 16 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2001), 232.
[2]Gulati and Isaac, "EMS Namboodiripad: Revolutionary Intellectual," 689.
[3]Gulati and Isaac, 690; Scholars have identified the land reform policies as the critical factor that expedited socio-economic advancements in Kerala. See for example, R. Ramakumar, 'Public Action, Agrarian Change and the Standard of Living of Agricultural Workers: A Study of a Village in Kerala', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 6, no. 3 (July 2006): 306–45.

transformation' of the agricultural sector.[4] This revolution was to be brought by severing the roots of land monopoly, followed by the legal takeover of feudal properties and the introduction of cooperative farming administered scientifically. From urging the Namboothiris to take to the fields and the factories, in his earlier political avatar, EMS shifted his energies to the demolition of landlordism and the redistribution of land to the social group termed as peasants. EMS was trying to imagine a new milieu outside caste and community organisations — the radical, labouring peasant class. This mission was primarily not based on annihilating caste but on creating an avenue outside of caste-community affiliations – the peasant class.

This chapter takes a closer look at EMS's communist self that exhorted the peasants, as a labouring class, to rise and dismantle landlordism. It appears that EMS, who belonged to one of the most prominent landowning Namboothiri families of south Malabar,[5] was attempting to demolish the very basis of power his community had wielded for centuries — the possession and control of land. Despite the divided self of the Namboothiri reformer and communist, EMS interlinked these two processes to the political shift from the pre-modern feudal to the modern, secular social order consisting of labouring human beings devoid of caste/ community affiliations. This chapter will show how EMS constructed the project of demolition of landlordism through his interventions in the left peasant public along the same continuum as the humanisation of Namboothiris, through internalisation of modern political values — equality, rights, and entitlements. More importantly, it will address the implications of the intellectual transition from the field of caste power to that of secularised class power.

In doing so, the focus on Malabar becomes crucial, where EMS was born and based his initial phase of public interventions. In the case of peasant mobilisations, Malabar has a special significance. Compared to Cochin and Travancore, which had transitioned to capitalist agriculture, the 'most backward form of landlordism' was present in Malabar in the early decades of the twentieth century.[6] The region had seen periodic and some of the most intense peasant uprisings in Kerala, including the

[4]EMS Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1, 100 vols. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 201–8.
[5]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 42.
[6]Ramakumar, 'Public Action, Agrarian Change and the Standard of Living of Agricultural Workers', 308.

Malabar/ Mappila Rebellion of 1921. I will limit this analysis to EMS's writings on peasants and agrarian issues between the 1930s and 1950s. The interventions of communists among peasants had played a crucial role in cementing the foundations for the party in Kerala, especially in Malabar.

The chapter begins with an outline of the condition of peasants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Against this context, the various peasant uprisings in the region till the 1930s are contextualised. It then provides a brief history of left politics in Kerala before focusing on the left engagements with the peasant question in Malabar. It then focuses on the left public sphere and analyses the emergence of a left peasant public in Malabar by mapping the work of Karshaka Sanghams as available in the socialist newspaper, *Prabhatham* (meaning, 'the dawn') between 1938-39. This chapter will argue that a historical understanding of Malabar's history of peasant unrest and uprisings is essential to EMS's radical programme of agricultural transformation. Understanding the historical context of feudal subjugation is necessarily the first step towards a better grasp of how the oppressive land relations could be dismantled and the peasant as a class be located within the empowering land-man equation. This understanding will provide a context against which we can interpret EMS's interventions concerning peasants and agriculture in Malabar.

Let us first focus on the condition of peasants in Malabar in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Background of Peasant Uprisings in Malabar

In the late-nineteenth century, over 55 per cent of Malabar's population depended on agriculture for their livelihood.[7] Within this agricultural-dependent population, 10 per cent constituted landholders with proprietary rights on land.[8] By 1921, the total population dependent on agriculture grew to 61.5 per cent.[9] Northern and southern Malabar differed in terms of land holding/ownership pattern and the attendant

[7]M. Raghavan, *State Failure and Human Miseries: A Study with Special Focus on Famines in British Malabar*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2016), 28.
[8]Raghavan, 28.
[9]K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 32.

cultivation practices. As the average area under ownership/ landholding was comparatively smaller in northern Malabar, proprietors themselves undertook cultivation without much hired labour. The predominant form of cultivation in northern Malabar was garden lands where tenants grew pepper, coconut, and other cash crops.[10] In contrast, land holdings were larger in south Malabar. The predominantly rice-cultivating areas of south Malabar, viz., the southern taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad, Palakkad and Ponnani, contributed to 70 per cent of Malabar's grain production.[11] Moreover, land was leased out to tenant farmers, who made up more than two-fifths of the agricultural-dependent population in Malabar. If agricultural labourers formed 38 per cent of the total agricultural-dependent population in Malabar in the late-nineteenth century, they had grown to be about 60 per cent by 1921.[12] This set of labourers consisted of agrestic slaves too, who, according to an estimate from 1801, formed 13 per cent of Malabar's population.[13] Even upper caste tenants with smaller land holdings relied on hired labour, including slave labour, for cultivation.[14]

KN Panikkar argues that at the turn of the twentieth century, peasants in Malabar suffered under the double burden of colonial and landlord oppression, chiefly on account of the extraction of the surplus of agricultural production. British land settlement policies show that the cultivator could retain only one-third of the net produce. The rest was shared by the government and the *jenmi* (landlord) as per the following arrangement: 60 per cent of the produce from rice lands went to the government and 40 per cent to landlords, while the agricultural produce from garden lands was to be shared equally between the government and the landlord.[15] The British had entrusted tax collection to the *adhikaris* and *menons*, drawn predominantly from the landed, upper-caste sections of Malabar. These village officials would underassess lands held by them or those aligned to them while overtaxing the tenants from the lower levels of the peasantry who possessed minimal influence and were hamstrung by

[10]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 24.
[11]I. V. Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 2001), 79.
[12]Raghavan, *State Failure and Human Miseries*, 28–29.
[13]Malarvizhi Annal Jayanth, 'Abolishing Agrarian Slavery in Southern Colonial India' (Ph.D. thesis, Illinois, The University of Chicago, 2020), 3.
[14]Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, 32.
[15]Panikkar, 6.

powerlessness.[16] Although revenue was to be paid to the government by the landlords, the actual burden of taxation fell on the tenants.[17] Coupled with various other taxes covering almost all aspects of daily life and the British monopoly on articles such as salt, tobacco and timber, peasants and agricultural labourers were under considerable financial pressure in the early-twentieth century.[18]

More exacting than the British land revenue and taxation policies were the many 'legal' and 'illegal' forms of rent collected by the *jenmi*s in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. These were facilitated by the British interpretation of local, 'customary' norms and practices of landholding in terms of European notions of private property. In the pre-existing traditional *jenmam-kanam* tenurial system, the net produce of the land was to be shared equally between the *jenmi* (holder of the *jenmam* tenure) and the *kanakkaran* (who held the *kanam* tenure) and the cultivator.[19] The *kanam* was more or less a permanent form of tenure, with the *kanakkaran* renewing the arrangement from time to time. In addition to the privileges accorded to the *jenmi*, *kanakkaran* and the cultivator in the system, agricultural labourers were entitled to specific rights. Thus, in theory, the customary system provided for labourers, including the artisanal castes who supplied agricultural implements and the Cherumars who were bonded/ enslaved labourers.[20] According to Panikkar, the British reinterpreted the traditional *jenmam-kanam* system in a manner favouring the landlords, thereby establishing the *jenmi* as 'the absolute proprietor of the soil'.[21] For example, *kanam* transformed from a practically permanent tenure to one limited to twelve years.[22]

As mentioned before, land was unevenly distributed in Malabar. While most of the landlords held less than one acre of land, a significant percentage held extensive tracts of land. These non-cultivating landlords were drawn principally from the upper caste sections who lived on the rent collected from the land they had leased out to the

[16]Panikkar, 7.
[17]Panikkar, 11–12.
[18]Panikkar, 12–18.
[19]Panikkar, 19.
[20]Panikkar, 19.
[21]Panikkar, 21.
[22]Panikkar, 20–21.

tenants.[23] The sub-infeudation of lands by the non-cultivating *jenmi*s led to the rise of the *kanakkars*, mostly upper-caste Nairs. They formed the intermediary class of *kanakkar*s, positioned between the *jenmi* and the peasants. The intermediary *kanakkars* were simultaneously a rent-paying and rent-receiving class and earned most of the profits from the land sub-leased by them to smaller tenants.[24] They would appropriate a larger share of the rent than the *jenmi*s. Although the norms of feudalism did not govern their relations with the sub-tenants, the *kanakkar* resorted to 'typically feudal' methods of expropriation to maximise their share of the rent.[25]

Rack-renting was facilitated further by the growth of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, scarcity of land in proportion to this growing population and the rise in the prices of agricultural commodities throughout the nineteenth century.[26] Moreover, extortion from peasants began to be enforced through evictions and demands of gifts in kind for the *jenmi* throughout the year.[27] Although rack-renting affected the *kanakkar*s who turned against the *jenmi*s, the peasants bore the brunt of this exploitation. However, the intermediary tenant class of the *kanakkars* began to lobby with the British government for laws that put a stop to the arbitrary practices of the *jenmi*s. Their efforts led to the promulgation of the Malabar Tenancy Act in 1930. This legislation protected the *kanakkars* against arbitrary evictions. While the law assured fixity of tenure to wetland cultivators in theory, the marginal tenants did not have the resources to legally challenge the *jenmi*s in case of any injustice. So, it largely remained ineffective as far as the lower-class tenant-cultivators were concerned. Another significant defect of the law was that it did not address the problems of garden cultivators concentrated in northern Malabar as much as it catered to the wetland cultivators concentrated in south Malabar.[28]

Northern Malabar taluks such as Chirakkal and Kottayam had seen the rise of a layer of small-scale cultivators in the 1920s who had leased out forest lands from big

[23]Panikkar, 26.
[24]Panikkar, 28.
[25]Panikkar, 30.
[26]Panikkar, 36–38.
[27]Panikkar, 42–45.
[28]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 127.

landlord households to cultivate cash crops such as pepper. This was a response to the boom in pepper prices in the 1920s. However, the market collapsed with the onset of the Great Depression and the commencement of World War II. As pepper prices crashed, the cultivators turned to other subsistence crops, and the landlords began to prevent their customary access to forest produce like firewood. With the erosion of their customary rights, the cultivators were at the mercy of the landlord families. Additionally, Malabar faced acute food shortages and famine during the 1940s. In fact, Raghavan's work documents how famines ravaged Malabar in the late-nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, made more harrowing by the periodic outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera.[29]

What is to be born in mind is that these exploitative land relations were embedded in the larger matrix of caste power, which engulfed almost all aspects of individual and social life. Landlordism was essentially a mechanism of caste. For example, Dalits were not only allowed to own lands, but they also had to constantly perform servitude:

> When a Dalit or person of the oppressed castes stood in front of a landlord, he did so with his back bent forward and hands clasped in front of him, or else he would be punished severely. A Dalit was not permitted to wear a lower garment (*mundu*) that extended beyond the knee. He had no right to wear slippers or to wrap a towel-cloth around his head.[30]

Even when Malabar transitioned to capitalist forms of agriculture, patterns of inequality based on social location – be it gender, caste, community, or tribal identity – perpetuated in complex forms.

The extraction practices and the resultant immiseration of peasants during the colonial period gave rise to periodic uprisings in Malabar. One can trace the rebellion of Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam (head of a principality in Malabar), aided significantly by the Kurichia and Kurumba tribes of Wayanad, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century to the exorbitant taxes the British imposed in the

[29]Raghavan, *State Failure and Human Miseries*.
[30]R. Ramakumar, 'Aspects of the Peasant Movement in Malabar: An Interview with E. K. Nayanar', *Review of Agrarian Studies* 4, no. 2 (December 2014): 112 Also see p. 117.

territory.[31]Although the British quelled the rebellion by 1805, the Kurichya and Kurumba tribes of Wayanad rose in revolt again in 1812. A more prolonged spell of resistance came from the predominantly Mappila Muslim peasants of Malabar, who challenged the combined might of colonialism and landlordism throughout the nineteenth century, which eventually culminated in the Mappila/ Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Between 1836 and 1919, no less than 32 Mappila uprisings were recorded.[32] Most of these incidents were reported from the southern taluks of Ernad, Valluvanad and Ponnani, where 60 per cent of the Mappilas in Malabar were concentrated.[33] Except for a few *jenmis*, cultivating tenants, and landless labourers, most of the agricultural-dependent Mappilas in Malabar.[34] Correspondingly, the majority of the rebels were either tenants or agricultural labourers.

Furthermore, the targets of the Mappila strife were mainly government officials and men of property.[35] The resistance of Mappilas against the colonial-landlord nexus came to be portrayed as a Hindu-Muslim conflict by the British, an interpretation receiving wider purchase given the predominantly caste-Hindu composition of the landed elite and government officials whom the Mappila rebels targeted. Mappila resistance received an impetus with the activation of the Congress-Khilafat movement and the subsequent government attempt to suppress it. From August 1921, violent confrontations with the police and the Mappilas happened in many parts of the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks. The rebellion was brought under control by the end of the year.

While peasant distress was a core aspect of the Mappila uprisings and the Kurichya-Kurumba revolts preceding it, one must not limit these episodes of peasant unrest entirely to economic subordination, be it those associated with caste or with agrarian transformation under colonialism. Colonialism had brought about significant shifts in the way of life of the peasant communities in Malabar that touched the economic and other aspects, including their social organisation and 'religious' and

[31] See chapter III titled "Wayanad in Arms: The Revolt of Pazhassi Raja, 1800-1805" and chapter V titled 'The Tribals in Arms: The Kurichya Revolt of 1812' in George Alex, "Socio-Economic Milieu of Anti-Colonial Struggles in Malabar" (Ph.D. thesis, Kerala, Kannur University, 2014).
[32]Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, 85.
[33]Panikkar, 53.
[34]Panikkar, 53.
[35]Panikkar, 87.

cultural beliefs. For Kurichyas, for example, their induction into bonded/ slave labour in Wayanad due to repressive land settlement policies and capitalist agrarian transformation also meant the loss of their particular way of life.[36] The Raja of Manjeri's 1847/48 order to the tenants to contribute towards constructing a temple was as much an economic burden as an irreligious act for Mappilas.[37] In other words, the colonial affront upon the economy was at once an affront to the social and cultural life of the people. Into this colonial zone of non-legitimate authority, the traditional elite castes of non-Muslim religious denominations weighed in with their oppressive demands, fuzzing the lines dividing colonial state power and indigenous power structures. And thus, the agrarian uprisings must be characterised by highlighting these multi-layered dimensions of the everyday lives of peasants.

Similarly, exploitation of cultivators and agrestic slaves by landlords was only one aspect of power imposed by the caste system: caste subordinated individuals and groups at all levels of human existence. Thus, peasant movements against the *jenmi* exploitation have a potent anti-caste component. Hence, one also must consider the anti-caste movements in Malabar that contributed to peasant mobilisations. The reform efforts in Malabar by Vagbhatananda (1889-1934), who established the Atmavidyasangham in 1917, are especially significant. Those who became part of the anti-caste interventions of Vaghbhatananda had to face caste repression, including denial of work and eviction from land in the case of cultivators. Vaghbhatananda, for example, appealed to the Kadathunadu Raja for the provision of security of tenancy and against arbitrary eviction. The reformer also established credit and labour cooperatives to address the loss of livelihood.[38] The work of Vaghbhatananda is credited to have set the stage for later left peasant mobilisations in Kurumbranad taluk.[39]

The left mobilisation of peasants from the early-1930s was qualitatively different in terms of how peasants and their discontents were framed. Among other things, it approached the peasant question as primarily an economic problem. In other words,

[36]Alex, 'Socio-Economic Milieu of Anti-Colonial Struggles in Malabar', 241.
[37]Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, 75.
[38]See chapter II in T. M. Thomas Isaac and Michelle Williams, *Building Alternatives: The Story of India's Oldest Construction Workers' Cooperative*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2017).
[39]"Varenyathayude Azhukkilakkiya Kulisamaram," *Deshabhimani*, January 12, 2015, sec. Wayanad.

left movements abstracted the economic from the larger matrix of the social power of *jenmithvam* and subsumed the socio-cultural aspects of oppression under it. Before elaborating on this point, let us first briefly look at the emergence of left politics in Kerala and the engagement of the Communist Party concerning peasants before delving into EMS Namboothiripad's interventions in the peasant question.

Left Politics in Kerala: A Brief Overview

Kerala can be marked on the map of left political movements as part of both organised and isolated left political collectives from the early-twentieth century. This included individuals linked to international communist organisations and relatively localised communist mobilisations. For example, ACN Nambiar (1896-1986) was reportedly part of the Communist Party in Germany, where he had been a student.[40] While NC Shekhar (1904-1986) formed the Communist League in Travancore in 1928 along with leaders like Ponnara Sreedhar, NP Gurukkal and Thiruvattar Thanupilla. The Communist League was an organisation inspired by the Russian Revolution and maintained no connection with other left political groups in Kerala in its short-lived existence. Malayali nationalists came into contact with radical thinkers and groups from other parts of India in the late-1920s and early-1930s, and the subsequent intellectual exchanges led to the founding of the Congress Socialist Party (hereafter, CSP) in Kerala in October 1934.[41] These included figures like P Krishna Pillai (1906-1948), K Damodaran (1912-1976), EMS Namboodiripad (1909-1998), and KA Keraleeyan (1910-1994), who would be instrumental in the founding of the Communist Party in Kerala.

The Kerala chapter and a working committee of the CPI were formed in Kozhikode in 1937 in a meeting attended by NC Sekhar, Krishna Pillai, KA Keraleeyan, EMS and Damodaran under the guidance of the CPI leader, SV Ghate.[42] In the first meeting, they decided not to publicly call or identify themselves as 'communists' and decided to make a base in Kerala by engaging with CSP.[43] However, as differences emerged among socialists over the question of supporting World War II, most of the

[40]M. Rasheed, *K. Damodaran (Jeevacharithram)*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Sign Books, 2021), 65.
[41]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 131.
[42]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 66.
[43]Rasheed, 66.

Kerala CSP members who opposed the War shifted to CPI in 1939.[44] In the tumultuous period of the 1940s, CPI built its base across Kerala through peasant and working-class movements. From the primarily radical and confrontational approach it adopted in the 1940s, both with the colonial state and the nascent nation-state of India, CPI shifted to parliamentary democracy in the early-1950s. In 1957, one of the world's first democratically elected communist governments, with EMS Namboodiripad as the first chief minister, came to power in Kerala. Through the periodic left ministries in Kerala since 1957, the CPI championed several measures, including land reform which had played a crucial role in shaping the development experience of the state.

Dilip Menon identifies two distinct phases in elaborating on the nature of Marxism, which provided the ideological direction to the CPI. The first phase was characterised by 'millenarian' tendencies, manifested in an 'ethical, egalitarian and emotive understanding' rather than an engagement with the 'central categories or historical trajectories' of Marxism.[45] In this view, the Soviet Union was the utopia that Marxism represented, described as the place where class conflict vanished and countless small peasants owned land.[46] This ethical-emotive understanding gave way to the adoption of a rigid, self-contained, Stalinist variant of Marxism. In this perception, Marxism was the 'science of the history of society'.[47] Menon underlines two primary features of this new interpretation of Marxism in Kerala: one, the idea of the emergence of productive forces and the adjustment which relations of production must undergo with the rise of new productive forces; and secondly, the five relations of production – primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism and socialism – one superseding the other. The belief in a linear view of society and the idea of progress underscored the view of Marxism as the science of society.[48]

According to Bidwai, most Indian communists were unfamiliar with other doctrines and approaches within the canon of left theories, let alone the left-wing literature critical of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). They were either

[44]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 159.
[45]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 35–36.
[46]Menon, 36.
[47]Menon, 37.
[48]Menon, 37.

ignorant of the Moscow trials (1936-38) in which Stalin purged the old Bolshevik guard except himself or was unwilling to acknowledge the same. In EMS's case, his fascination for the Soviet Union was built on the idea of its apparent prosperity while the capitalist world was reeling under the Great Depression. Knowledge of the social costs of this apparent prosperity, including the various Soviet famines, had not reached EMS then. Left to a Stalinist version of dialectical and historical materialism, they did not engage with the Western theoretical tradition of Marxism, embodied in the works of Marx or Lenin. The dogmatic approach discouraged Indian communists from exploring non-Marxist analyses of Indian society. These factors prevented a holistic comprehension of Marxist theory and creative and independent application of the Marxist method in the context of India. This hindered them from understanding the realities of the country and devising appropriate strategies.[49]

Peasants and Communism in Malabar

Given the predominance of agriculture as the source of livelihood in the early-twentieth century Kerala and the relatively nascent state of the industry, peasants emerged as a critical constituency for CPI. Nissim Mannathukaren observes that,

> From the beginning, for example, it [Communism in Kerala] was under no stagist illusion that it had to construct an industrial working class and capitalism before it could think about socialism. It understood very well that it was absolutely based on the peasantry and its struggles since Kerala was an agriculture-dependent society. Very early on, it was clear that the party's success was due to support of the peasantry and agricultural labor. It also recognised that the conditions in which it functioned resembled the Chinese situation more than the Soviet one.[50]

Using Dilip Menon's work on the history of communism in Malabar, we can identify five phases in communist peasant mobilisation between 1934 and 1949. The first phase was between 1934 and 1939 when the CPI organised peasants in Malabar against agrarian inequalities and caste practices.[51] In Malabar, left-oriented nationalist

[49]Praful Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*, 1st ed. (Noida: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 5.
[50]Nissim Mannathukkaren, *Communism, Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory: The Left in South India*, 1st ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 253.
[51]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 131.

leaders like Keraleeyan, Vishnu Bharatheeyan, AV Kunjambu and KPR. Gopalan began to organise peasants in the early-1930s. Memoirs also document the role of communist leaders like Krishna Pillai and AK Gopalan in organising peasants in rural areas of Malabar.[52] Karshaka Sanghams began to be established across Malabar, and resistance against the landlord-colonial nexus took the form of an organised movement. The numerous Karshaka Sanghams that emerged across Malabar in the period had urged the challenging of unequal socio-economic relations and attempted 'a wholesale change in the attitudes of people; a transformation of rural structures of deference and authority'.[53]

The second phase was between 1939 and 1942, when the CPI began to organise peasants in Malabar. Once CPI entered the scene, the party encountered a tense situation in Malabar brought by food shortage and famines in the wake of the outbreak of World War II. As big landowning households began to stockpile food grains and attempted to cash in on the rising market prices, there emerged a demand for the lease of wastelands for cultivation.[54] The CSP had not been entirely successful in limiting its focus to the opposition of feudal exactions and rents. In the 1940s, the CPI faced pressure to challenge caste inequalities and police repression further. The lack of an effective organisation capable of managing the rising peasant unrest in Malabar, coupled with the ban of CPI in 1940, resulted in a loss of its control over the Karshaka Sanghams. The volunteer groups of peasants trained in the use of lathis and formed with the intention of resisting attack on Sangham members were active in this period. The turbulence culminated in a confrontation at Kayyur in Chirakkal taluk in March 1941 when a two-hundred-strong crowd killed two policemen.[55] With this, the government began to suppress the activities of Communists, and peasant unionism was declared unlawful in Malabar and South Kanara. Punitive police stations were installed across north Malabar, and Malabar Special Police (hereafter, MSP) was brought in.[56]

[52]K. Madhavan, *Oru Gandhian Communistinte Ormakal*, 5th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhath Book House, 2016), 119–26.
[53]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 131.
[54]Menon, 163.
[55]Menon, 166–68.
[56]Menon, 168.

The third phase (1942-1945) was the period of 'rural regeneration'.[57] This phase began with lifting the ban on CPI and the declaration of the People's War line that advocated class harmony and cooperation with the state.[58] In the context of the crisis brought by food shortage, CPI in Malabar sought to focus on cultivating wastelands and growing more food. To access wastelands, the party had to negotiate and bargain with the landlords. Dilip Menon says that this move sought to curb peasant militancy that had gone beyond its control while also supplying the landowners with compliant labourers.[59] Additionally, CPI emerged as an intermediary between the government and those holding stocks of grain, both big landlords in the rural areas and the rice merchants in the towns.[60] The party thus achieved a 'temporary balance' by enlisting itself as the mediator between the rural elites and the militant landless people between 1942 and 1945.[61] However, this delicate balance was upset, and the party shifted towards the stance of agrarian radicalism between 1946 and 1948, the fourth phase.

In 1946, as the brief camaraderie with the landlords achieved during the early-1940s broke down, the CPI reversed its placatory position. The ending of 'the feudal lord-*jenmi* system' and the establishment of the ownership of the cultivator over the land reassumed priority. Opposition against the payment of rent and the landlord's share of the crop began to arise. The transfer of paddy was blocked, and the police and armed villagers came face to face in Karivellur and Irikur in Chirakkal taluk in Dec 1946. The volunteers re-energised and began coordinating random acts of resistance to police and landowners. Thus, CPI managed to harness individual initiatives toward the occupation and cultivation of wasteland.[62] The militancy continued in 1947 too. The Congress ministry in Madras, however, sought to curb communism and intensified the deployment of the police in north Malabar.[63] It continued to adopt the policy of severe repression through the MSP. Congress also formed a volunteer group and entered into confrontations with alleged communist groups. However, more decisively was its

[57]Menon, 159.
[58]Menon, 189.
[59]Menon, 169.
[60]Menon, 171.
[61]Menon, 173.
[62]Menon, 180–82.
[63]Menon, 183.

hesitance towards implementing land reform by redistributing the land of big landowners and would instead suggest the collectivisation of the land of small cultivators.[64]

The fifth phase was characterised by the shift to an agrarian revolutionary stance by the CPI in Malabar. This change followed the April 1948 call for a revolution in the countryside. This line required the mobilisation of movements uniting poor peasants, middle peasants, and the agrarian proletariat.[65] And the CPI began to support 'agricultural labourers, other rural labourers and poor peasants' who were regarded as 'the backbone of the movement'. However, the support of this landless category over tenant cultivators resulted in the latter deserting CPI. Conflicts also arose over accessing grains – by force or through payment. Differences of opinion on this resulted in veteran leaders like Sardar Chandroth and Subrahmanian Thirumumb, who opposed violent means of securing grains, leaving the party.[66] The resultant crisis led to the loss of control over militancy. Pitched battles between landless labourers and the MSP in places including Thillenkeri and Onchiyam between April and May 1948 followed.[67] By September 1949, CPI was banned, and by October, the leadership in Malabar were jailed.[68] In the face of the brutal suppression of militancy by the state and the control exercised by landlords, the party shifted its stand from 'ultra-leftism' to a position of engagement with the state. From 1951, CPK began to participate in elections.

However, the organisational history and the shifts in the CPK approach to the peasant question briefly summarised above do not exhaust the vast realm of left politics in Kerala. The most significant aspect that mediated left politics in Kerala was a vibrant public sphere, which shaped and was shaped by it. We will briefly look at the role of the public sphere in left political movements in Kerala before focusing on the left peasant public in Malabar.

[64]Menon, 184–85.
[65]Menon, 186.
[66]Menon, 186–87.
[67]Menon, 187.
[68]Menon, 188.

Public Sphere and Left Politics in Kerala

The well-established print public sphere had played a crucial role in fashioning the left public sphere in Kerala.[69] Writings on left ideas and international left theorists-leaders had begun to appear in the Malayalam print public in the opening decades of the twentieth century. One of the earliest biographies of Karl Marx in India was authored by Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai (1878-1916), a political activist cum journalist from Travancore. It was published five years before the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution inspired more writings, as in the case of Malayalam novelist P Kesavadev (1904-1983), who wrote *Agniyum Sphulingavum* (The Fire and the Spark), a pamphlet containing the biographies of Lenin and Trotsky in 1931 and which EMS reviewed in *Unni Namboothiri*[70] in the same year. The *Sahodaran* magazine, published between 1917 and 1956 by anti-caste reformer K Ayyappan (1889-1968) to spread the message of social justice, science, and brotherhood, published an image of Lenin much earlier than other publications.[71] Ayyappan had reportedly claimed that *Sahodaran* had been the pioneer propagators of Communism by publishing articles and poems exposing capitalism and arguing for Communism.[72] Writings on left ideas had been appearing in non-left publications as well. For instance, the nationalist-inclined *Mathrubhumi Weekly* had featured articles on socialism and communism in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, EMS distinguished publications that featured literature on socialist/ communist themes from communist literature. Accordingly, communist journalists must help and lead practical programs to prepare the people to fight for communism. These programmes included struggles for higher wages and better working conditions, struggles of peasants against high taxes and land evictions and for better prices, and struggles for attaining and maintaining civil rights. By aligning with these struggles and

[69] A detailed discussion of public sphere and left public sphere is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a recent study which traces the transitions in the "public" in Kerala, See Harikrishnan Sasikumar, 'Social Spaces and the Public Sphere: A Spatial-History of Modernity in Kerala, India' (Ph D thesis, Dublin, Dublin City University, 2020).
[70]EMS Namboodiripad, "Agniyum Sphulingavum," in *EMSinte SampoornaKritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 133–35.
[71]EMS Namboodiripad, *Deshabhimaniyude Charithram*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1992), 5.
[72]Namboodiripad, 5–6.

reporting them truthfully, one becomes a communist journalist.[73] In this respect, *Prabhatham* was one of the first Communist newspapers. *Prabhatham* had first started in 1935 from Shoranur. As the periodical had encountered financial difficulties and repression by the British for publishing allegedly seditious content, *Prabhatham* was shut down in 1937.[74] The second stint of *Prabhatham* was from 1938 to 1939, following a decision to launch a weekly to promote the socialist cause.[75] EMS described the role of the newspaper as that of an agitator and organiser at the same time.[76] Gradually, other left-leaning publications like *Navajeevan, Janayugam, Navayugam, Navalokam, Saghav, Communist, Party Jeevitham, Party Sanghadakan, Krishikaaran, Thozhilali, Democrats, Chintha, Keralam* and *Pothujanam* also appeared between the 1940s and 1980s.

KK Warrier's article in the August 1944 issue of *Party Sanghadakan* ('party organiser') illustrates the importance accorded to print medium, especially periodicals, by left organisations. In explaining the role of a 'party newspaper', Warrier contextualises *Prabhatham* and later publications like *Deshabhimani*.[77] The main agenda of *Prabhatham* was to propagate socialism and explain and interpret the interventions of the left political groups along socialist principles. The newspaper kept aside one section for theoretical and intellectual articles and another for reporting the organisational activities to the people.[78] When *Deshabhimani*, the official organ of CPI in Kerala, was introduced in 1942, the discourse on socialism became popular. *Deshabhimani* had sought to clarify party positions and interventions and unify opinions mainly among party workers.[79] However, Warrier's guidelines for reports from local, district and state levels show that the party mouthpiece was adapting to report the

[73]Namboodiripad, 3–4.
[74]Namboodiripad, 5; EMS Namboodiripad, *The Communist Party in Kerala: Six Decades of Struggle and Advance*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: National Book Centre, 1994), 18.
[75]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 66.
[76]Namboodiripad, *The Communist Party in Kerala*, 17.
[77]K. K. Warrier, 'Party Pathravum Report Ezhuthalum', *Party Sanghadakan*, no. 3 (August 1944): 14–19.
[78]Warrier, 14.
[79]Warrier, 14.

issues pertaining to the larger public from their contexts.[80] Warrier also urged the party members to engage in the wider print public.[81]

Besides periodicals, other publications like pamphlets and books also played a significant role in creating a left public sphere. A few publishers and distributors catering to leftist literature emerged during this period. An example is TL Karunakaran's book stall in Tellicherry, where newspapers like *New Age, National Front,* and *Congress Socialist* published by Agra Company used to be available.[82] In the 1950s, the Soviet Union reportedly subsidised Malayalam books, pamphlets and newspapers, including a two-volume edition of Marx's *Capital,* at low prices.[83] In his critical take on the role of literature from Russia in 'indoctrinating' people, Benjamin N Schoenfeld observed that:

> Communist-printed media of communication are written simply, often by local well-known writers, tell an interesting story and always convey a Communist propaganda moral. Such materials may be used to teach reading to the illiterate and are available for all grades. These books, attractively illustrated and bound, are sent from Russia, Romania and Czechoslovakia. … Because of the scarcity of books it is not at all unusual to find small groups listening to a reading by some member of the Communist Party. In the small shops where workers are congregated, such literature is often read to the workers while they work. The outcome of this entire process is a well-informed, alert and highly indoctrinated corps of workers supporting the party.[84]

However, EMS countered the characterisation of communist attempts to develop a space for literature and culture among peasants and working classes exclusively to 'propagandist' ends. In a speech, EMS said,

> Organising the peasants and the workers by the communists were not only for understanding their everyday problems. Along with understanding their everyday issues we aimed at their cultural progress. As part of this we ensured that literature and culture are well introduced to the peasants and workers of Kerala. As a result, we have writers and

[80]Warrier, 17–19.
[81]Warrier, 19.
[82]See advertisement: "Socialist Sahithyam," *Prabhatham*, June 20, 1938.
[83]Benjamin N. Schoenfeld, "Kerala in Crisis," *Pacific Affairs* 32, no. 3 (September 1959): 239.
[84]Schoenfeld, 239.

> artists emerging from the workers and peasants. A crowd in Kerala has emerged that could appreciate these (art) forms.[85]

During the 1930s, a wide range of reading rooms and libraries emerged in the villages of Malabar. Reform movements and community activities had a far-reaching role in the library movement in Kerala, making the act of reading more public. The library movement in Kerala curated literature, art, history, rationalism, and progressive thoughts for the public. Communists in Kerala converted the libraries more accessible and made them 'peoples' libraries. Towards the end of the 1940s, there were more than a thousand reading rooms and libraries throughout Kerala.

Mapping the Left Peasant Public in Malabar

This section will study aspects of the emerging left public in Kerala by taking the case of the mobilisation of peasants in Malabar from the 1930s, as represented in the print publications of the time. In particular, we will see how CSP shaped a left public by organising peasants in Malabar against landlordism and oppressive colonial state policies. I will do this by analysing *Prabhatham*, the mouthpiece of CSP, during its existence between 1938 and 1939. A chief arena that mediated EMS's shift from Congress to Congress Socialism and finally communism was his involvement with the peasant movement of Malabar from the early-1930s. Analysis of *Prabhatham* thus provides context to EMS's interventions in shaping the emerging left peasant publics, elements of which went into government policies and moulded Kerala society.

K Damodaran requested the Madras government to start a newspaper called *The Socialist* as the mouthpiece of CSP in Kerala. Although the request was denied, with the intervention of C Rajagopalachari, they secured permission in 1938 to revive *Prabhatham* with EMS Namboodiripad as the editor.[86] *Prabhatham* can be compared to other socialist newspapers like *Janashakti,* run by Jeevanantham in Tamil Nadu. The importance of the juncture in which *Prabhatham* appeared is that cultural interventions and a new language was pitched for communist mobilisations in Kerala.[87] Though EMS

[85]EMS Namboodiripad, *EMSinte Thiranjedutha Prasangangal*, ed. C. Bhaskaran (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2012), 260.
[86]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 67.
[87] See Nissim Mannathukaren, 'The Rise of the National-Popular and Its Limits: Communism and the

was the editor, K Damodaran, along with NC Sekhar and Krishna Pillai, used to oversee the composing, printing and other operations. The newspaper was sold in the streets of Kozhikode by Krishna Pillai, NC Shekhar and K Damodaran.[88] AK Gopalan, the newspaper's managing director, recorded that *Prabhatham*, with no capital per se, ran on funds collected from the peasants and workers.[89] An additional source of revenue was advertisements, as can be inferred from a survey of the 1938and 1939 issues of *Prabhatham*. Among other things, *Prabhatham* covered the activities of Karshaka Sangham extensively and provided ideological and organisational directions to party workers.

The readers of the newspaper mainly were the workers and members of CSP. Published from Kozhikode, a well-connected town in Malabar, *Prabhatham* could reach a wider reading public encompassing left networks in Travancore. While Malabar was the focus of the newspaper, strikes and struggles for the democratic rights of the people from Travancore also found space in *Prabhatham*. Thus, *Prabatham* acted as an agent in bringing Travancore (South) and Malabar (North) together. This bringing together of two regions through the problems it raised on behalf of workers and peasants contributed to the Aikya Keralam (United Kerala) movement. While being a weekly newspaper from the 1930s and the mouthpiece of CSP, *Prabhatham* can be looked at as an attempt to create a left discourse in the Malayalam print public sphere.[90]

Prabhatham came with fifteen to sixteen pages. The front page usually addressed topics and news related to Malabar or other socially relevant themes. The subsequent pages carried columns like 'Innathe Lokam' (the world today), 'Karshaka Lokam' (peasant world), reports of the proceedings of CSP, columns clarifying ideological positions, and news about peasants and peasants' organisations in different parts of Malabar, and book reviews. The paper reported peasants and workers from regions like Andhra, Punjab, and Bengal. The column 'Nagaram' (city) carried news from

Cultural in Kerala', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 494–518.

[88]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 67.

[89]Rasheed, 67.

[90] A detailed discussion of the 'communist print worlds' in Kerala is beyond the scope of the chapter. Instead, the focus is on *Prabhatham*, which provides a detailed picture of the Karshaka Sangham activities in Malabar in the late-1930s.

the metropolitan cities of India, such as Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Literature, music, and art from Soviet Russia too found a place in *Prabhatham*. *Prabatham* reported the people's lives and took the interventionist mode by putting forward suggestions to attain and strengthen the idea of freedom and prepare a model for equality that ensured quality of life for all.

The contributors of *Prabhatham* were well-organised and sought to shape the consciousness of the working classes and the peasants through their writings. For example, leaders like Keraleeyan wrote extensively about the plight of peasants in Malabar; K Damodaran, EMS and KK Warrier wrote on socialism, communism, Marxism, values that it represented, and on themes like capital, money, and wage. Malayalam writers like SK Pottekad and Premji contributed extensively through short stories, poems and plays that portrayed the lives of peasants and workers. In comparison, writers like Pavanan, Gopalankutty Menon and Unni Raja wrote on party programmes. While reporting the problems of peasants toiling under landlordism, the paper also worked as a critique of British rule by carrying news reports and articles demonstrating the effects of repressive and divisive colonial laws in people's lives. *Prabatham* was thus an outcome of a larger movement that was at work and later found its expression in the regional political scapes of Malabar and Travancore. Compared to other newspapers and periodicals of the early-twentieth century Kerala, which mainly represented the world of upper castes or specific caste community mouthpieces, *Prabhatham* marked a new epoch in terms of representing the lives of common people and bringing new subjects into the forefront of Kerala's print public, that is the peasant and workers.

One can glean several aspects about the working of Karshaka Sanghams in Malabar from *Prabhatham*. This includes organisational structure, mobilisation methods and strategies, ideological presuppositions, and the construction of a class discourse by the peasant organisation.

Organisation

Commentators, including EMS, have argued how in the early-1930s, Congress Socialists would tour the villages of Malabar, deliver speeches about peasant problems, and set

up youth clubs, libraries and reading rooms to reach out to people.[91] By 1938-39, the establishment of Karshaka Sanghams had become much more organised. Reports from several *amshams* (a revenue unit) of Malabar in 1938-39 show the steps involved in setting up a *pradeshika* or 'local' Karshaka Sangham: a *prachara nayogam* (literally, propaganda meeting) at a public place will be organised where 'respectable' personalities will speak of the need for the Sangham.[92] Resolutions highlighting specific local issues will be passed. For example, in the meeting at Vengara in Chirakkal taluk on 9th October 1938, following the passing of the resolution demanding Chirakkal Kovilakam to end *jaasthipanam* (a form of rent), about 100 peasants joined the Sangham.[93] The meetings usually involved marches organised by the Karshaka Sanghams in adjacent areas.[94]

Reports from *Prabhatham* give the picture of Karshaka Sangham meetings. Most meetings were formal affairs, presided over by a chair and speakers who were local and national leaders. The speakers would elaborate and clarify party positions and ideological points. Resolutions about local issues or those suggested by the taluk and Malabar Karshaka Sangham would be passed in these meetings. The meetings involved hoisting the red flag, which symbolised a 'hunger-free, joyous new dawn' for the toiling masses around the world.[95] Revolutionary slogans such as 'inquilab zindabad', 'long live revolution' and revolutionary songs would be recited on these occasions.[96] Women and children participated in such meetings under separate organisations such as Mahila Sammelanam and Balabharatha Sangham, respectively.[97] Apart from the predominantly male speakers, women leaders like 'Mrs Subrahmanian Thirumumb'[98] and Onden Thayamma[99] addressed such meetings. Public meetings organised at the taluk level or jointly by different local Karshaka Sanghams were bigger, with peasants from 1000 to

[91]EMS Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1944-45)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 50–51.
[92]"PracharanaYogangal," *Prabhatham*, October 3, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[93]"PracharanaYogangal," *Prabhatham*, October 24, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[94]"PracharanaYogangal," *Prabhatham*, November 28, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[95]"Kozhikode Taluk KarshakaSammelanam," *Prabhatham*, May 23, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[96]"Alambadambu Onnam Karshaka Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, May 30, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, January 23, 1939.
[97]"Blathur Karshaka Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, January 23, 1939; "Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam."
[98]'Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam', 2.
[99]Sankaran Moyarath, "Kalliatte Krishikkarude Uthkanta," *Prabhatham*, January 30, 1939, 21.

15,000 marching from different localities.[100] In the mega convention of peasants in Hosdurg in January 1939, food was provided by the peasants themselves, who carried rice and vegetables as a headload as they walked to the meeting.[101]

The local Sanghams came under the purview of the taluk-level Karshaka Sangham. The taluk Sanghams also oversaw the establishment of new Sanghams in the area under its ambit.[102] The taluk Karshaka Sanghams were affiliated with the Malabar Karshaka Sangham, which was part of the All India KarshakaSangham/ the All-India Kisan Sabha.[103] A speech delivered by EMS at the Ponnani taluk peasants meeting in May 1937 offers more clues regarding the organisation and strategies of a local Karshaka Sangham. EMS described the local Karshaka Sangham as the backbone of the peasants' movement.[104] *Prabhatham* reported that the local Sangham usually set up an office and a library. EMS recommended a central location for the local Karshaka Sangham office in its area of activity.[105] The office must run a routine programme to attract the peasants, such as reading and explaining the contents of newspapers, reading agricultural department leaflets and political literature, and magic lantern demonstrations especially to attract younger peasants.[106] AK Gopalan, for instance, urged the activists in Valluvanad to dedicate at least an hour to organisational activities.[107] The objective was to make the Karshaka Sangham office a hub of local peasant activity.[108] One such activity that Karshaka Sanghams took up was setting up night schools.[109]

EMS further argued that the peasants who take an interest in Sangham should be sensitised to the significance of the organisation, the need for struggling for fundamental rights, and the causes of oppression.[110] Here, the role of the *pravarthaka*

[100]"Eramam Karshaka Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, January 30, 1939, sec. Karshakalokam; "Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam," 1.
[101]'Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam', 1.
[102]"Kozhikode Taluk Karshaka Sangham," *Prabhatham*, October 3, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[103]Sardar Chandroth, "Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam," *Prabhatham*, May 8, 1939, 8.
[104]EMS Namboodiripad, "Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1936-38)*, ed. T Sivadasa Menon, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2006), 219–25.
[105]Namboodiripad, 223.
[106]Namboodiripad, 223.
[107]"Valluvanad Taluk Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, April 18, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[108]Namboodiripad, 'Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?', 224.
[109]"Nisa Padashala," *Prabhatham*, November 7, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[110]Namboodiripad, 'Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?', 224.

committee, i.e., a working/ primary committee, became necessary to coordinate the organisation's activities in the locality. Thus, when a local Sangham was established, a primary/ working committee was usually elected.[111] In a 1938 article, EMS mentions the role of the primary committee: to visit the peasants in the locality, enquire about their conditions and make themselves available for the assistance of peasants.[112] For example, the committee members can explain the laws applicable to the peasants and offer legal counsel.[113] There were periodic meetings at the taluk and district levels when representatives would be elected, and organisational matters and issues common to local Karshaka Sanghams would be discussed.

Once the peasants had been mobilised, the Karshaka Sanghams developed a core of volunteers. The All India Karshaka Sangham has recommended the formation of a well-trained volunteer core to strengthen, develop and efficiently lead the Karshaka Sanghams and thus bring the peasants' struggle to success.[114] The volunteers were to function as full-time activists who would establish more Karshaka Sanghams. The necessity of volunteers emerged due to the severe repression the Karshaka Sangham had to face.[115] A volunteer training camp was organised in Ernad taluk in which individuals selected from each taluk and with diverse educational capacities attended.[116] Classes were given on various topics, including the evolution of the human race, world history, French revolution, Russian revolution, world constitutions, Indian history, Indian National Congress, India's economic history, peasant-worker movements, war and the minority question.[117] In addition to these topics, training in first-aid classes in toxicology (*vishavaidyam*) and physical activities like standing guard were also part of this training.[118]

[111]"Puthiya Karshaka Sanghangal," *Prabhatham*, November 14, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[112]EMS Namboodiripad, "Karshikaaswasa Niyamam Upayogappeduthaan," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1936-38)*, ed. T Sivadasa Menon, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2006), 334.
[113]Namboodiripad, 334.
[114]Chandroth, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam'.
[115]P. Narayanan Nair, "Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam," *Prabhatham*, January 9, 1939, 6.
[116]Mullan, "Ernad Talukile Volunteer Parisheelanam," *Prabhatham*, July 31, 1939.
[117]Mullan, 17.
[118]Mullan, 17.

Karshaka Sangham organisers used art to reach out to the peasants and spread the messages of revolution. *Pattabaki*, an acclaimed play that portrayed the life of peasants, was conceived and written by K Damodaran as a way to attract peasants to the upcoming Ponnani taluk Karshaka Sangham meeting in 1937.[119] *Pattabaki* assumed popularity and was screened across Malabar after Karshaka Sangham meetings.[120] The actors often were the Karshaka Sangham leaders, including Keraleeyan, AK Gopalan, Sardar Chandroth and KPR Gopalan.[121] *Prabhatham* also mentions the screening of farces named *Pattinippalayam* and *Parakkampachil* after the meetings.[122] A 1939 article mentioned the use of drama, songs, poetry, radio programmes and films in the popular movements of Europe and China and made a case for using art and literature as instruments of revolution.[123] The writer also suggested that each taluk Karshaka Sanghams arrange small dramas and farces depicting peasant life; thus, the space commanded by ritualistic art forms and 'unreal' plays and films in rural areas can be captured.[124] We have already seen how songs were part of the peasant meetings and marches. T Subrahmanian Thirumump wrote revolutionary songs and recited them at the Sangham meetings.[125] The Kozhikode taluk Karshaka Sangham published a small booklet called *Krishipat,* which consisted of songs written by Theruvath Raman, a writer and journalist.[126] *Prabhatham* recommended the songs in the book as apt for workers and peasants to sing during the marches. *Prabhatham* also published revolutionary poems in its issues. For example, writer Premji's poem *Unararai* and *Krishikkarante Manorajyam* exhorts the toiling peasants to rise against the idle landlord.[127]

Ideology

Karshaka Sangham mobilisation was centred around shaping peasant politics based on *vargabodham/ vargachethana* or class consciousness. In this view, the peasants formed

[119]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 39–40.
[120]Rasheed, 40; "Kottayam Taluk Moonnaam Karshaka Sammelanam," *Prabhatham*, May 16, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Kozhikode Taluk Karshaka Sammelanam."
[121]Rasheed, *K. Damodaran*, 40.
[122]'Eramam Karshaka Sammelanam'.
[123]S. H., "Karshaka Prasthaanathinte Oru Vasam," *Prabhatham*, January 30, 1939.
[124]S. H., 12.
[125]'Alambadambu Onnam Karshaka Sammelanam'.
[126]"Krishippattu," *Prabhatham*, May 23, 1938, sec. Njangalude Vayanasala.
[127]Premji, "Unararai," *Prabhatham*, May 30, 1938; Premji, "Krishikkarante Manorajyam," *Prabhatham*, February 20, 1939.

a class whose interests were oppositional to other classes, such as landlords and moneylenders. Hence, EMS's insistence that the peasants must form the core of the local Sangham.[128] While one or two non-peasants who can assist the Sangham can be elected to the primary/ working committee, this cannot be a *jenmi* or moneylender because the latter's interests are fundamentally oppositional to that of the peasants and the resultant possibility of the weakening of peasant struggle.[129] Sahajanand Saraswati argued that although peasants have an illustrious legacy of protests and movements, they have failed.[130] Even the successful uprisings could not improve the condition of peasants in India. Saraswati attributed this failure to the lack of class consciousness. Referring to Lenin's conception of the 'naïve peasant', Saraswati urged revolutionaries to inculcate class consciousness in peasants which tends to get immobilised from time to time and give it a permanent shape and organisation.[131]

Given the prominent place of workers in the Marxian concept of class struggle, there seems to have arisen an ambiguity in the role of peasants vis-à-vis the workers. For example, Saraswati argued that although workers are considered powerful, peasants are more formidable, with the power to shake power centres and the ability to control the economy.[132] However, such possible tensions were addressed through the slogan of worker-peasant unity. In Malabar, the Sangham leaders tried to proclaim the message of a joint front of peasants and workers united through *vargabodham*.[133] In fact, taluk Sanghams in Malabar had directed the local Sanghams to convey this idea to their respective constituencies.[134] In meetings and marches, peasants and workers were brought together, and unity of struggle was emphasised. Workers' organisations usually supported and reinforced peasant marches, especially in the cities.[135] Speakers at these meetings argued that since peasants and workers shared the same plight, their goals were the same.[136] The Karshaka Sangham seemed to have been guided by the principle

[128]Namboodiripad, 'Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?', 222.
[129]Namboodiripad, 223.
[130]Sahajanand Saraswati, "Lokathilengum Krishikkar Sanghadikkunnu," *Prabhatham*, December 19, 1938, 13.
[131]Saraswati, 13.
[132]Saraswati, 12.
[133]P. Krishna Pillai, "Vargabodhathodu Koodi Sanghadikkuka," *Prabhatham*, June 6, 1938.
[134]"Chirakkal-Kottayam Karshaka Sanghangal," *Prabhatham*, 29 May1939, 14.
[135]"Kisan Masdoor Raj Zindabad," *Prabhatham*, December 28, 1938.
[136]'Kisan Masdoor Raj Zindabad'.

that the exploitation of any other person is the exploitation of the self.[137] The ultimate goal of establishing *kisan-mazdoor raj* was frequently invoked in meetings.

Nevertheless, the idea of the naïve peasant who must be imparted class consciousness endured. A report on Chirakkal and Kottayam taluk Karshaka Sanghams claimed that despite their lack of education, knowledge of the world and class consciousness, they know that their economic struggle resists oppression by *melalar* (social superiors) upon their property, dwellings, and their bodies. Public meetings, consultation meetings, study classes and publications were reported to have improved the general knowledge of the peasants. The report lauds the taluk Sanghams for successfully cultivating class consciousness among peasants.[138] At the same time, EMS argued that the transactions between the Sangham activist and the peasant must not be unidirectional; instead, the activists must also take the advice/ inputs given by the peasants.[139] They must make the peasants themselves narrate their problems and the solutions for their problems; than the role of an advisor, the activist must be a friend who partakes in the happiness and woes of the peasants.[140] However, the activists and their subjects, the peasants, existed in a field of complex power relations. *Prabhatham* throws light on how the relationship between the Sangham activist and the peasant unfolded on the ground, the contradictions and negotiations associated with the organisation of peasants.

An article on an activist's encounter with 'an elderly Malabar peasant' who shares his views regarding the organisational activities of the Karshaka Sangham is a case in point.[141] The peasant man spoke of 'the local, intra-peasant feuds arising chiefly from scarcity of resources, including water'; in this context, peasant organisations must start with finding solutions to local problems rather than 'lofty speeches'.[142] The elderly peasant emphasised the need for constant interaction by activists with local people and in a language that was relatable to the local people.[143] The meetings should be held in

[137]'Chirakkal-Kottayam Karshaka Sanghangal', 14.
[138]'Chirakkal-Kottayam Karshaka Sanghangal', 14.
[139]Namboodiripad, 'Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?', 219.
[140]Namboodiripad, 'Karshikaaswasa Niyamam Upayogappeduthaan', 334.
[141]F., "Aa Vayassan Krishikkaran," *Prabhatham*, December 19, 1938.
[142]F., 7–8.
[143]F., 8.

open, accessible spaces like grounds rather than closed rooms in schools with chairs and benches, which are unfamiliar and might intimidate the local peasants.[144] The old peasant also reportedly expressed misgivings about the presence of Namboothiri activists. Although the upper-caste activists may not be hesitant to mingle freely with the lower-caste peasants, the latter might find it difficult to 'be around' the leaders.[145] Besides, the peasant offered a caste critique: 'The organisation needs more of lower caste members while the leaders are mostly from upper castes.'[146] This was a pertinent observation given the predominantly upper-caste composition of Karshaka Sangham leadership. While the author lauded the knowledge of the 'illiterate, innocent peasant who has not read Karl Marx', he interpreted the caste critique as an instance of the peasant's *vargabodham* or class consciousness.[147]

However, the attempt to fashion a class-conscious peasant devoid of 'communal' or 'caste' affiliations was complicated given the volatile socio-political conditions of early-twentieth century Malabar. In the immediate aftermath of the Malabar Rebellion, which was violently suppressed by the British and upset social relations between communities, Karshaka Sangham tread with caution. For fear of the repetition of another upheaval, southern Malabar saw only milder forms of peasant mobilisation vis-à-vis northern Malabar.[148] The Sangham tried to disseminate the message of class conflict among Muslims. In the fourth taluk meeting at Valluvanad, a region with a high Muslim population, the Karshaka Sangham had got ZA Ahmed, a CSP leader, to inaugurate the meeting.[149] Moreover, in his address, Ahmed stated that there are only two classes – the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressed must wrest their rights from the oppressor class, and to realise this aim, the peasants must join the Sangham irrespective of their caste or community backgrounds. Ahmed also described those who try to divide people on caste and religious basis as vested interests eyeing positions in district boards and municipalities.[150] In the mega peasants' meet at

[144]F., 8.
[145]F., 8.
[146]F., 8.
[147]F., 7–8.
[148]Namboodiripad, 'Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram', 50–51.
[149]"Karshakar Enthinu Sanghadikkanam," *Prabhatham*, April 17, 1939.
[150]'Karshakar Enthinu Sanghadikkanam', 5.

Kodakkat in Chirakkal taluk in northern Malabar, the Kisan Sabha leader Professor NG Ranga appealed to the Muslims to join the Karshaka Sangham.[151]

Muslim presence and participation in Karshaka Sangham meetings were given particular attention. Thus, we find references to 'the presence of Muslims' in Karshaka Sangham meetings, an observation that was not made about any other social group.[152] Another report about Kuttiyadi Karshaka Sangham taking over a Muslim League meeting in Vadayamsham in Kurumbranad taluk noted 'loud cheers from Muslim peasants'.[153] Muslim support for a peasant march in Kasargode was interpreted as the success of secular, class-based struggles over communalism:

> Another fact worth mentioning is the great generosity expressed by Muslims we met throughout. The enemies of the peasants had tried to spread the rumour that the march was against the Muslims. As a result, they had approached the march with some hostility. However, on listening to the explanations from the marchers on the objectives of the protest, they began to support them. The experience of this peasant march has proved how an atmosphere vitiated by the communal mentality and religious competition vanishes in front of the rectification of the real issue of the poverty of the poor. It also proves the claim of peasant activists that they, who raise economic issues, are best suited to preserve religious harmony, is just. This is a significant achievement of the march.[154]

According to a report of the peasants' march of December 1938, 'it was natural for the *bahujanangal* (common masses) to unite across caste-community differences under the banner of a movement that focuses on economic issues.'[155]

A similar process of writing class over identity can be seen in the left leaders' approach to the question of castes and tribes. Karshaka Sangham had worked with the tribal communities concentrated primarily in the eastern hilly tracts of Chirakkal taluk. These included the Paniya, Vettuvar, Mavilor, Karimbalar, Cheror and Aranadan tribes. In the early-twentieth century, they had been forced into agrestic slavery.[156] In the views

[151]'Kodakat Karshaka Sammelanam', 2.
[152]'Pracharana Yogangal', 3 October 1938.
[153]"Muslim League Yogam Karshaka Yogamayimari," *Prabhatham*, November 28, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[154]"Kudiyayma Niyamamillatha Kasargode," *Prabhatham*, December 19, 1938, 5.
[155]"Malabarile Karshakar Charithram Nirmmikkunnu," *Prabhatham*, December 19, 1938.
[156]K. A. Keraleeyan, "Kurumulaku Krishikkar," *Prabhatham*, 29 Aug1938, 11; "'Adimathozhilali

of Karshaka Sangham organisers, these groups were 'hapless illiterates', treated as nothing more than 'two-legged animals'.[157] In their estimation, these pre-historic people lived in the darkness of oppression, and the light of modernity was yet to reach them. It was up to the 'red cap' volunteers of Karshaka Sangham to enlighten them and end their slavery.[158] Certain castes such as Cheruma, Pulaya, Kanakka and Vettuva were performing slave labour in Malabar.[159] The landlords would purchase the slave groups for one year in exchange for ten and fifteen *para* of grains and who were, in turn, exchanged for rent to cultivators.[160]

Prabhatham had carried reports of Karshaka Sangham activity among the different slave castes and tribes in Malabar. Accordingly, in a public meeting of 'slave labourers' in Chirakkal taluk, the Adima Thozhilali Sanghadana (Slave Labourers Union) was formed. All labourers who were present joined the organisation, and a fifteen-member working committee was also formed. In the meeting, Chirakkal taluk Karshaka Sangham president M Kunjiraman Nambiar spoke of the various difficulties faced by the slave labourers, their lack of freedom even to earn their livelihood and the need for organising.[161] These slave communities were classified as 'agricultural labourers', the group of people who performed agricultural labour but, because of their landless state, did not fit the category of peasants. Karshaka Sangham leaders acknowledged the centrality of caste in landlordism, which resulted in extortion, untouchability, maintenance of a specific lifestyle, language, and other forms of oppressive practices; however, in calling the 'oppressed' to bring a socialist system, they ignored the play of caste among the peasants and the possible ways in which caste might have become reproduced.[162]

Sanghadana," *Prabhatham*, November 14, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; E. K., "Nirakshararaaya Karshakar," *Prabhatham*, January 9, 1939, 16.

[157]Keraleeyan, 'Kurumulaku Krishikkar', 11.

[158]E. K., 'Nirakshararaaya Karshakar', 16.

[159]"'Adimathozhilali Sanghadana"; T. K. Nilambur, "Eranadile Adimakachavadam," *Prabhatham*, September 4, 1939.

[160]"'Adimathozhilali Sanghadana."

[161]"'Adimathozhilali Sanghadana."

[162]Chandroth, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam'.

Modes of Resistance

The interventions of Karshaka Sanghams presented resistance to the oppression of peasants emerging from different levels – starting with the *jenmi*, to colonial government represented by local/ taluk revenue officials, police and Collector and specific laws. Sanghams used various methods to organise peasant resistance to the landlord and the colonial government. The most common method was marches and protest meetings. Thousands of peasants from several villages would march to the residence of the local *jenmi* under the leadership of Karshaka Sangham leaders. Then, a committee representing the peasants would meet the *jenmi* and negotiate the demands of the peasants.[163] In other cases, a committee/ delegate assigned by the Karshaka Sangham met with the landlords to raise the peasants' demands.[164] Marches towards government officials like local revenue officials (tahsildars) and collectors would also be organised.[165]

Marches from rural interiors to Collectorates located in towns often became mobilising events, camping in between the events and public meetings organised by local Karshaka Sanghams on the way.[166] The Collectorate March of 1938 organised to demand amendments in the Kudiyan Bill was an important event in the history of Karshaka Sangham. Representatives from each taluk from the north (Karivellur) and south (Kanjikode) Malabar took out a march over days, attending public meetings on the way where hundreds of smaller marches converged.[167] The Karivellur and Kanjikode marches finally assembled at Kozhikode in a mega meeting attended by thousands of peasants, workers, and a host of unions. This march is considered a historic event in the history of Karshaka Sangham in Malabar. In such marches, the volunteers and leaders would instruct the peasants on observing discipline and pacify them against

[163]"Koodalithazhathu Veetilekku Karshaka Jadha," *Prabhatham*, October 31, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[164]"Pattam Vangunnilla," *Prabhatham*, October 3, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[165]"Tahsildarude Aduthekku," *Prabhatham*, October 24, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Kasargode Karshaka Committee," *Prabhatham*, December 5, 1938.
[166]"Karshaka NivedakaJadha," *Prabhatham*, December 12, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[167]'Malabarile Karshakar Charithram Nirmmikkunnu'.

provocations allegedly caused by *jenmi*s.[168] In fact, the discipline of the crowds was greatly valued by Karshaka Sangham.[169]

We also see Karshaka Sangham making direct interventions in the respective localities: be it making local *jenmi*s using standard measures and weights,[170] returning what was extorted from the tenants;[171] or undertaking constructive activities like repairing bunds which the *jenmi*s refused to do;[172] enquiring, collecting evidence and reporting to the police or appropriate authorities, illegal activities like arbitrary eviction and the use of illegal units for measuring paddy paid as rent.[173] Karshaka Sangham would also resort to steps like petitions and signature campaigns.[174]

Karshaka Sangham also campaigned for amendments favouring intermediate and smaller tenants of the Malabar Tenancy Act, which catered to big landlords. As a result of widespread protests against the law, the government appointed a committee to study the suggested amendments. Karshaka Sangham took this opportunity to initiate a more comprehensive consultation among the peasants and propose certain amendments. It encouraged the peasants to depose before the committee and assigned local Sanghams to help them understand the queries posed by the committee. It also decided to print five thousand pamphlets to educate the peasants about the nature of the proofs to be produced before the committee.[175] *Prabhatham* published several commentaries on the law, the points to be kept while deposing before the committee,[176] and the questionnaire circulated by the committee for responses from the general public.[177] *Prabhatham* called for contributions from the interested regarding the various aspects that should be brought to the attention of the Malabar Tenancy Amendment

[168]"Poruthikkayi Karayunna Krishikkar," *Prabhatham*, November 14, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Karumathoorilekku Jadha," *Prabhatham*, October 31, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Janmithvathinte Maranagoshti," *Prabhatham*, December 12, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[169]K. A. Keraleeyan, "Karshaka Prasthanam," *Prabhatham*, April 24, 1939.
[170]"Janmi Varam Pidichuparikkunnu," *Prabhatham*, December 5, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[171]"Varappizha Madakki Vangi," *Prabhatham*, December 12, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[172]"Kuttooru Pradeshika Karshaka Sangham," *Prabhatham*, November 14, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[173]"Shariyallatha Para Mattuvaan," *Prabhatham*, October 24, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[174]"Karshaka Sanghadanaye Amarthuvan," *Prabhatham*, November 28, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[175]"Kasargode Karshaka Sangham," *Prabhatham*, July 24, 1939.
[176]K. A. Keraleeyan, "Thelivukodukkumbol," *Prabhatham*, July 24, 1939; P. Narayanan Nair, "Kudiyayma Committee Mumbake Enthellam Thelivukalaanu Samarppikkendath," *Prabhatham*, January 9, 1939.
[177]"Kudiyaymayil Varuthenda Maattangal," *Prabhatham*, August 14, 1939.

Committee to be published as a special tenancy committee issue.[178] We also find articles on other laws, such as the bill on tobacco tax.[179] We see here that the Sangham and *Prabhatham* actively played the role of a mediator between the peasants and the state.

Mobilisation of peasants by the Karshaka Sangham resulted in severe repression by the *jenmis* and colonial government. *Prabhatham* reported several forms of repression. Accordingly, the *jenmi*s targeted local peasants who were active in the Sangham. They threatened the peasants with banishment and other forms of social boycotts.[180] In many places, rumours were spread about the Sangham, especially its use of the red flag. The red flag led to allegations that the organisation was aligned with Russia and against Congress.[181] As a result, some Sangham meetings had to face slogans like 'go back to Russia' and 'stop disgracing the sublime ideals of the Mahatma'.[182] Hence, we find Sangham leaders clarifying the meaning of the flag in meetings[183] and asserting that the red flag will be hoisted along with the tri-colour flag.[184] Sometimes, peasant meetings were disrupted by the *jenmi*s and the revenue officials.[185]

There were many reports about false charges and complaints slapped on peasant activists. A common accusation against the Karshaka Sanghams was that they called for the social boycott of *jenmi*s by blocking caste-based services like *ettu-maattu*.[186] Narayanan Nair, the president of Malabar Karshaka Sangham, clarified that the traditional torture methods of denial of *ettu* and *matatu* employed by feudal lords were not weapons used by the Sanghams.[187] At the same time, Nair considered the possibility that social boycott might become a necessity and may even be justified in

[178]"August 7aamathe 'Prabhatham,'" *Prabhatham*, July 24, 1939.
[179]"Pukayila Nikuthi," *Prabhatham*, July 31, 1939.
[180]"Janmi Pizhappikkunnu," *Prabhatham*, May 23, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[181]P. Krishna Pillai, "Congressum Krishikkarum," *Prabhatham*, June 27, 1938.
[182]"Thudangi, Kalliattum," *Prabhatham*, November 14, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam, 7.
[183]"Puthiya Karshaka Committee," *Prabhatham*, October 17, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.
[184]Chandroth, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam', 8.
[185]"Pracharana Yogangal," *Prabhatham*, September 5, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam; "Janmithvathe Jayippikkan," *Prabhatham*, December 12, 1938, sec.Karshakalokam.
[186]*Ettu-maattu* refers to the set of practices concerned with the removal of different kinds of ritual pollution (pula) among the Thiyyas of Malabar. Accordingly, the specially appointed *kaavuthiyyan* performed the *ettu* ceremony to purify the ritual pollution resulting from birth and death. Eaattu could not be performed without *maattu* or freshly laundered cloth brought by the vannathi (woman of the vannan/ washer caste). Maattu also removed menstrual pollution. See T Rajan, *Vakbhadanandhan*, 2nd ed., Navakeralashilpikal 18 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2017), 43.
[187]Nair, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam'.

some cases. However, it has not been commonly accepted as the protest programme of the Karshaka Sanghams.[188]

In an article, Malabar Karshaka Sangham provided details of the oppression they had to face from the colonial-*adhikari-jenmi* nexus in Kasargode, Chirakkal and Kottayam taluks.[189] These included arbitrary arrests of Karshaka Sangham activists and members, often on fabricated grounds, threatening people with arrest, public parading of those arrested in handcuffs, intimidating people by visiting their huts when men are away and threatening them with police action; arbitrary inspection of Karshaka Sangham offices; installation of new police stations; deployment of CIDs. The *adhikaris* would give false reports to the revenue officials above them. The *jenmi*s unleashed violence against peasants. The thugs they sent pelted stones at houses at midnight and indulged in arson and abuse. A students' delegation visiting Chirakkal reported that the minions of the *jenmi*s attacked the houses of Karshaka Sangham members, abused their women, defecated and contaminated their wells, spreading false notices and flyers in the name of the Sangham (misinformation).[190] In Kottayam taluk, the tahsildar refused to accept complaints made by the Karshaka Sangham on behalf of the peasants.[191] Sometimes, the *jenmi*s prevented the peasants from collecting firewood and practising *punam* (shifting cultivation).[192]

The Sangham challenged these measures in several ways. The leaders articulated the repression as the response to peasants' assertion.[193] The defiant peasant, who had stopped paying different kinds of oppressive tributes and rents and started wearing shirts and moustaches, has prompted them to commit atrocities on him.[194] In *Prabhatham*, leaders would challenge accusations raised against Karshaka Sangham in other magazines.[195] Keraleeyan proposed a defence fund for running the cases charged against peasant activists and contributions from the general public, public activists and

[188]Nair, 6.
[189]Nair, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam'.
[190]E. K., 'Nirakshararaaya Karshakar'.
[191]"Karshakasangham Avalathikal Sweekarikkayilla," *Prabhatham*, January 30, 1939, sec. Karshakalokam.
[192]F., "Revenue Manthri KrishikkarudeIdayil," *Prabhatham*, January 2, 1939, 2.
[193]Moyarath, 'Kalliatte Krishikkarude Uthkanta'.
[194]Nair, 'Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam', 6.
[195]K. A. Keraleeyan, "Shavam Maravu Cheythu," *Prabhatham*, December 12, 1938, sec. Karshakalokam.

specifically, the peasant activists of Malabar.[196] Chirakkal taluk passed a resolution to form a defence committee to collect funds for the same.[197] Protest meetings and marches were organised, and resolutions were passed in the Sanghams across Malabar.[198]

In conclusion, *Prabhatham* was one among the many newspapers in the left movement that aimed to educate the common public about the values and principles it represented. Left print sphere also sought to envision an egalitarian society and endorse the agential role of the people in addressing and questioning the power structures that affected their lives and livelihood. Left print organs raised questions based on everyday living and introduced to the people how capital and labour work in people's everyday lives. Subsequently, it inculcated the principle of class consciousness among the people. Though the twentieth-century Keralam was grappling with identities, the new category introduced by the left intellectuals to understand the world did bring tensions and contradictions among individuals and social groups. The new idea of the 'people' (through the public) meant class. The 'public' came into being like an untold phenomenon that covered other aspects taking shape in twentieth-century Kerala.

EMS and Peasants

There are reasons to consider that peasants and the agrarian question had a unique and prominent place in EMS's career as an intellectual and Marxist political leader. This section, therefore, attempts to capture how EMS arrive at the peasant question through a critical reflection of his locations and the ideological shifts. In the process, the section will justify the focus on EMS's engagements with the peasant-land-agrarian question over his more extensive explorations as a Marxist intellectual, including his engagement with other sections of the working classes.

EMS was born in 1909 in a Brahmin landlord family in Valluvanad in early-twentieth century Malabar. As one of the taluks in the major rice-producing region of south Malabar, Valluvanad was characterised primarily by a feudal, agrarian economy

[196]K. A. Keraleeyan, "Pothujanangalodu," *Prabhatham*, January 2, 1939.
[197]P. Narayanan Nair, "Prathyekapolicil Prathishedham," *Prabhatham*, January 9, 1939.
[198]"Punitive Policil Prathishedham," *Prabhatham*, January 30, 1939, sec. Karshakalokam.

and caste-based social structure in the early-twentieth century. Namboothiris were more influential in the fertile southern regions than in other parts of Malabar.[199] Belonging to one of the largest landowning *jenmi* (landlord) families in the region, at least at the beginning of his public career, EMS's understanding of people who worked on the land and fields were defined mainly by the specific caste relations and practices of the Namboothiris. In fact, EMS recalls that the first time he heard the term 'Bolshevism' was around 1922-23 in the context of debates regarding the prospect of a Tenancy Bill that sought to curtail *jenmi* privileges on land and the tenants in Malabar. Namboothiri acquaintances of EMS would interpret the Bill as 'Bolshevism', a regime that was understood to have marked the end of landlordism in Russia. EMS mentions that he was 'naturally' inclined towards preserving upper-caste *jenmi* privileges then, although the same ideology would captivate him in less than a decade.[200]

As a young Namboothiri thinking about the community's trajectory in contemporary Malayali society, EMS was aware of the changing fortunes of the Brahmin community. A chief factor affecting the community was its shifting relationship to land and the attendant loss of power with the coming of modern British law, the transformation of land into private property and the emerging tenancy movement. In this period, changes in laws pertaining to inheritances and family holdings had generated numerous litigations around land. This led to the popularisation of the vocation of *vakils*, a profession which Nairs and the 'migrant' Brahmins would dominate by the early-twentieth century.[201] Following tenancy reforms, Namboothiris, as large landowners, engaged in legal contestations with tenants in the early-twentieth century. In this context, the reformist organization Yogakshema Sabha would educate the Namboothiris, who were given to conventional understandings of eternal ownership of land, in the nuances of modern law[202] and initiate steps to ease the community's transition to the new legal framework.[203] EMS notes that the argument for modern

[199]Babu, *Keraleeya Navothanavum Namboothirimaarum*, 79.
[200]EMS Namboodiripad, "Bolshevism," in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 9–10.
[201]Sreejith K, *The Middle Class in Colonial Malabar: A Social History*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2021), 18–19.
[202]Kunjiramamenon, 'Janmiyum Kudiyanum'; Kunjiramamenon, 'Janmiyum Kudiyanum: Vasthukaimattam'.
[203]Namboothiripad, 'Namboothiri Yogakshemasabha', 30–31.

education for Namboothiris began with the tenancy movement.[204] The tenant lobby's apparent influence on the British government and legislative members was attributed to the standing the former earned through modern education and government employment.[205] Hence, Namboothiris were actively arguing for the community to achieve the same through modern education and employment in government institutions.[206] *Jenmi* interests could be defended and pursued only if Namboothiris learnt English and took jobs in courts and revenue offices. EMS's 1927 article attempting to convince Namboothiris of the 'viability' of legal profession can be considered as belonging to this *jenmi* discourse.[207] EMS found that the occupation of a vakil catered to the livelihood needs of Namboothiris and brought *samudaya samunnathi* (community upliftment). EMS's comment that no other profession catered to the livelihood needs of Namboothiris as much as the legal profession shows the proliferation of litigations in the period. EMS also argued that a Namboothiri who takes pride in the community would certainly engage with the services of Namboothiri vakils, including mediocre ones.[208] By EMS's admission, his 'natural' inclinations toward the jenmi cause were at play when EMS voted against tenancy reforms in the same year at the Payyannur Congress conference.[209]

A significant event in EMS's childhood was the tumultuous Malabar Rebellion of 1921, a struggle which had seen disgruntled Mappila peasants up in arms against the *jenmis* and the oppressive colonial taxation regime that sustained the landlord class. EMS's autobiography recalls the deep impression left on him as a young boy by the Mappila rebels.[210] During the Rebellion, EMS and his family had to move temporarily to Cochin for fear of the Mappila rebels, who at that time were reportedly attacking the

[204]EMS Namboodiripad, "Puthiya Chalanangal," in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 36.
[205]Namboodiripad, 36–37.
[206]Namboodiripad, 37.
[207]EMS Namboodiripad, "Namboothirimaarum Vakeelpravruthiyum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1, 100 vols. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 39–42.
[208]Namboodiripad, 40.
[209]EMS Namboodiripad, "Madirasi Congressum Athinuseshavum," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 86.
[210] E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *E M S Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 42–43.

jenmi households.[211] Later, EMS would interpret the rebellion as a peasant uprising.[212] KKN Kurup argues that the Malabar Rebellion stirred the nationalist in EMS, drawing his attention to 'land problems of colonial origin'.[213]

As part of the Namboothiri reform movement, EMS was exposed to the critical debates surrounding the Namboothiri resistance to modernisation. Accordingly, one reason for the community's backwardness was the social structure that rendered Namboothiris decadent and idle. With the criticality provided by the socialist ideas encountered in the mid-1930s, EMS identified feudalism (*jenmithvam*) and Brahminness as the forces that stalled the modernization of Namboothiris. KKN Kurup argues that the *jenmi* background had provided EMS with a unique standpoint that lent itself to a critical understanding of the complex problems of tenants, agricultural labourers and intermediary landlords.[214] In this context, EMS began to argue for Namboothiris to shun their idle lifestyles and transform into labouring human beings. In this regard, EMS strongly urged Namboothiris to take up agriculture as an occupation, a suggestion factoring in contemporary realities. EMS anticipated the rise of the strata of cultivators and agricultural labourers among the Namboothiris with class interests antagonistic to that of the *jenmi* Namboothiris, a change facilitated by among other things, the fragmentation of landholdings owing to the partition of households. Thus, the agrarian context in Malabar in which he was embedded by his *jenmi* status and later, as a socialist critical of landlordism, had played a vital role in the trajectory of EMS as an intellectual and communist leader.

A change in EMS's understanding outside his inherited knowledge of the peasants and agriculture happened with his involvement in the Gandhian programmes of civil disobedience and Harijan upliftment. EMS was part of a committee to receive Gandhi during his tour to Malabar in 1933.[215] As part of the committee, EMS made trips

[211] EMS Namboodiripad, "Khilafat," in *How I Became A Communist*, Library (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1976), 42.
[212]EMS Namboodiripad, "Malabarlahala Karshaka Lahalayano?," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1938-42)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2006), 109–12.
[213]K K N Kurup, "EMSum Keralathile Karshaka Samarangalum," in *Eeyemmesum Aadhunikathayum*, ed. Rajasekharan S, 1st ed. (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, 2011), 141.
[214]Kurup, 141.
[215]EMS Namboodiripad, "Muzhuvansamaya Rashtreeya Pravarthanathinte Thudakkam," in *EMS Aathmakatha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 167–70.

throughout the Valluvanad region to collect funds for Gandhian programmes, wherein he encountered Congress activists of diverse political opinions.[216] During this time, EMS also came under the sway of 'left' mobilisations within Congress. Under the guidance of P Krishna Pillai, the pioneering Communist leader, EMS became associated with the peasant and agrarian questions. EMS organized a meeting in his home taluk of Valluvanad against a hike in land taxes in Malabar and was elected as an office bearer of a committee formed after the meeting. EMS also began to follow the satyagraha against agricultural debts in Cochin and studied the reports associated with the issue. These engagements culminated in a three-part article in the *Mathrubhumi*, analysing the various dimensions of the problem of agricultural debt.[217] One of the first articles EMS wrote on peasants in 1935 called for a fundamental economic transformation through political struggle.[218]

EMS's engagements with the peasant-agrarian question entered a new phase with his membership in the Malabar Tenancy Committee. Also known as the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee, the Madras Government had constituted it in 1938 to study tenancy in Malabar. The Committee would recommend amendments to the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930. EMS analysed the nature of landlordism in Malabar before British colonialism and the impact of colonialism on the region's economy and recommended certain checks and balances that would end the arbitrary exercise of power by *jenmis* over land and peasants. EMS marks the *Minute of Dissent to the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Report on Malabar Tenancy Reforms* as the beginning of his analysis of Kerala's society and economy.[219] EMS says that these intellectual exercises were significant in the development of the peasant movement in Malabar.[220] P Govinda Pillai considers the report an important milestone in the political career of EMS and Kerala's socio-political history.[221] Pillai states the importance of the dissent

[216]Namboodiripad, 169.
[217]EMS Namboodiripad, "Socialism: Enthinu, Engane," in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 60.
[218]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar."
[219]EMS Namboodiripad, "Munnettathinte Adyavarshangal," in *Oru Indian Communistinte Ormakkurippukal*, 1st ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1987), 74.
[220]Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 60.
[221]P Govinda Pillai, "Avatharika," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 19.

note as a cardinal document that provided the foundation for the subsequent land reforms and the famed developmental model of Kerala.

By the late-1930s, EMS became part of the Karshaka Sanghams, formed under the aegis of the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar. In North Malabar alone, forty Sanghams had been founded in 1934.[222] And EMS had emerged as the spokesperson of the KCSP, which had been organising the Karshaka Sanghams.[223] As the editor of the short-lived newspaper *Prabhatham*, the mouthpiece of the Congress Socialist Party, EMS wrote prolifically about the agrarian problems and peasant mobilization in Malabar in the late-1930s. His writings, however, were not limited to *Prabhatham*. EMS would write about peasant issues, document peasant struggles and mobilization, analyse the nature of feudalism, and devise strategies for organising the peasantry in Malabar. EMS's association with CSP also exposed him to the problems of agricultural labour, the emerging peasant movements elsewhere in India, and peasant leaders from these places. For instance, EMS would visit Patna, where he witnessed peasant mobilizations and movements and wrote about them. EMS came under the sway of Jayaprakash Narayan (hereafter, JP) and the idea of 'Socialist Bardoli' he put forward in a CSP meeting in 1935. Accordingly, the aim of CSP was to capture Indian villages, which formed the basic unit of British India. The party must form a strong foundation in villages and evolve a programme of capturing power in villages using the collective strength of the masses. Although JP's programme departed from Gandhi's, aspects of the Gandhian programme, such as the organization of the rural poor based on grave everyday issues, offered lessons.[224] With a socialist goal and an associated strategy/ programme of action, such protests can mark the end of feudal land ownership, the attendant rent system, exploitation by money lenders, and exploitation through taxes.

JP called upon CSP leaders and volunteers to focus their activities in the village, study in detail the travails of the rural poor and launch movements that solve these

[222]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 131.
[223]EMS Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Congress Pravarthanavum Socialistukarum," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1927-35)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2009), 193. 195.
[224]EMS Namboodiripad, "'Socialist Bardoli,'" in *EMS Aathmakadha*, 9th ed. (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2008), 216.

problems. The leaders of these movements must earn the respect and love of the rural people and be capable of enlisting the people in the struggle against the government. The mass power thus accrued must be used to secure power centres through revolutionary means. He called on to make every Indian village a 'Socialist Bardoli'.[225] As someone who had been able to draw up a 'general perspective' on organizing peasant struggles on the three major agricultural problems of tax, indebtedness and rent through his involvement in the anti-taxation movement in 1934 in Malabar, EMS found JP's ideas attractive. He began to imagine Malabar as a 'Socialist Bardoli' where peasants have been organized on the basis of the three problems against British imperialism and feudal land ownership.[226]

However, EMS's sustained involvement with the Karshaka Sangham in Malabar exposed him to the fundamental limitations of JP's programme. For one, the peasant movement in Malabar was not limited to the villages; it was interlinked to a series of the developments such as urban worker strikes, the protests and struggles of students and other sections of the masses; and within the villages, the rise of agricultural labourers (and not just peasants).[227] As EMS gained a communist perspective, the socialist views were completely transformed. EMS arrived at a view that while the peasant movement had an important role to play in the growth of the revolutionary movement, it could not remain aloof. The growth of the peasant movement was dependent on organized workers' movement and other mass movements. The sole vanguard of the mass revolutionary movement, of which the peasant movement was a part, was the working class. Besides, EMS would take time to understand the critical role played by agricultural labourers in the peasant movement. The growth of the Kisan Sabha, formed in the 1930s and flourished in the 1940s, had mostly excluded the labourers. He came to adopt the view that 'the chief revolutionary agency in a capitalist society is the proletariat' and that 'the capacity to provide leadership to all sections of the masses, including peasants, rests with the proletariat'.[228] Also, EMS came to view JP's socialism as just another version of Nehruvian socialism that sought to enlist the

[225]Namboodiripad, 217.
[226]Namboodiripad, 218.
[227]Namboodiripad, 218.
[228]Namboodiripad, 220.

labouring classes (*daridranarayana* in Gandhian parlance) behind the bourgeois leadership who were at the helm of the anti-colonial movement. CSP was a version of the 'bourgeois socialism' described by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto.[229]

In the early stages of EMS's involvement with peasant unions, his role was more of an organizer coordinating protests and other events than a mass leader who engaged directly with the peasants. Unlike prominent left leaders like P Krishna Pilla or AK Gopalan, who would organize other sections of the proletariat, such as factory workers, EMS's most intensive engagement with the working classes was limited to the peasants. As EMS admits, it will not be before 1940 that he will gain experiential knowledge of peasant lives.[230] Until then, his affinity for peasants was ostensibly 'intellectual', shaped by knowledge gained from books and statistical data. At this point, peasant welfare was an intellectual-ideological concern for EMS, an 'essential element in societal progress'. During his life with peasant-proletarian families in northern Malabar in 1940-1942 and 1952, as he evaded police capture, EMS acquired a perspective where farmers and other working-class lives were not just an entity for study/ analysis/ social intervention but as 'living, human beings'.[231] The time spent with peasant families would also educate EMS in 'proletarian characteristics' like 'resourcefulness, political consciousness, courage, and conviction for struggle'.[232] EMS would credit this experience for the transformation from his 'textbook' view of peasant life to first-hand experience.

The following sections attempt to analyse EMS's writings concerning the peasant question in Malabar.

Defining 'Peasant': Inclusions and Exclusions

In what is probably his first article on the peasant question, EMS argued that the resolution of the agrarian question was not to be achieved by demanding/ securing incremental reforms/ concessions from the state through legislation.[233] EMS identified

[229]Namboodiripad, 'Socialism', 63.
[230]EMS Namboodiripad, "Thirinju Nokkumbol," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1954 Dec- 1956 Nov)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 16 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2001), 323–24.
[231]Namboodiripad, 325–28; Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," 26.
[232]Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," 26.
[233]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar."

that the key to peasant problems was land monopoly enforced by the 'imperial-feudal nexus'. Only by uprooting land monopoly through political struggle and initiating an economic programme consisting of cooperative farming and scientific agriculture could peasants seek an end to their problems.[234] Evidently, EMS had been influenced by the policy of collective farming championed by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. Given the affinity of Malayali socialists and communists for the Soviet model in the early-1930s, the five-year plans had been lauded as a remedy for agrarian problems.[235] However, the statements made by left organisations and leaders generally fell short of elaborating the concepts and categories used. For instance, in calling for land redistribution in India to cultivators in 1934, CSP did not specify the oppositional categories of the 'landlord' and 'cultivator'.[236] On the other hand, EMS sought to theorise and complicate the idea of the peasant/ cultivator (and its opposite, the landlord) in his 1935 article on peasants in Malabar.

EMS adopted the governmental classification of the agricultural-dependent population of Malabar into five:[237]

(1) Non-cultivating landowners: The non-cultivating landowners are the socially and economically powerful *jenmi*s, who form 5 per cent of the population but control 85 per cent of the agriculturally dependent population in Malabar.
(2) Cultivating landowners: although just 9 per cent of the total agricultural-dependent population, they are differentiated from their 'idle' counterparts.
(3) Non-cultivating tenants: The other non-cultivating section is the *kanakkar* forms 4 per cent of the agriculturally dependent population. Agriculture is an 'investment' of the money earned by other means for this intermediary group.
(4) Cultivating tenants: form 38 per cent of the agricultural-dependent population. Apart from a few cultivating *kanakkar* tenants among them, the rest are poor, illiterate and unorganised, subject to the arbitrary practices of the idle *jenmi*s and *kanakkar*.

[234]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar," 207–8.
[235]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 35–36.
[236]Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, 132.
[237]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar," 203–6.

(5) And finally, 'wage-labourers'. They form the majority (43 per cent) of the agriculturally dependent Malabar population. They suffer oppression from all classes, including untouchability and 'remnants of slavery'.

In spelling out these categories, EMS would mark their relative importance to the peasant movement in Malabar. Thus, EMS accorded prime importance to agricultural labourers in peasant movements, followed by cultivating tenants. Both these groups were termed 'cultivators'. The numerically small yet powerful non-labouring landed classes (*jenmi*s and *kanakkar*s) were singled out as 'idle' and given the least importance in the peasant movement. However, EMS also differentiated the labouring *jenmis* from the non-labouring, idle landlords.

From grading peasants and marking their relative importance to the peasant movement in Malabar in 1935, EMS arrived at a concrete definition of the peasants in 1937.[238] As per this conceptualisation, the category of peasant/ cultivator was referred to as *nadathukaar* (literally, 'those who run the land'), i.e., the tillers. Accordingly, cultivators are those who 'sow and reap the land, notwithstanding the basis of the landholding, with or without the help of hired labour, and for which they owe/pay tax to the government or rent to the landlord'.[239] Before we examine the implications of this definition, it is pertinent to observe that the five-tier colonial classification of the agricultural-dependent population employed essentially European categories of 'peasant'. In pre-colonial Kerala, agriculture was essentially a caste-based occupation. With the adoption of the category of 'peasant', the caste-based nature of agriculture began to be understood as a class. The new analytical category of class subsumes and secularises the earlier social relations of agriculture. However, caste ultimately gets reflected in land relations. A second feature of the European colonial categories is the fixity accorded to social practices and identities. This concrete identity of the peasant does not account for the mobile and fluid nature of the agricultural practice. Therefore, the secularised, fixed category of the peasant comes with certain limitations, and this characterised EMS's definition of the peasant.

[238]Namboodiripad, "Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?"
[239]Namboodiripad, 220.

If the 1935 article considered agricultural labourers as 'cultivators', EMS's 1937 definition exempted agrarian proletariats. Despite being the least idle and most oppressed, the wage labourers, along with the 'idle' classes, lay outside the definition of the cultivator. While the lack of application of labour was why idle landowners and tenants were excluded, the criteria of tax payment excepted agricultural labourers, who constituted 43% of the agricultural-dependent population of Malabar. EMS provided the following reasons for excluding agricultural labourers from the definition of peasants. The first reason is semantic because the definition of the Malayalam word *krishikkar* (cultivators/ peasants) does not include them. Secondly, although they performed agricultural labour, most of the agrarian proletariat in the hinterlands was a mobile, fluid mass alternating between different sectors and strictly did not remain under agriculture. According to EMS, this flexibility made the agricultural labourers closer to the urban proletariat than peasants.[240]

I want to emphasise the third reason for the exclusion of agricultural labourers from the definition of peasants. EMS mentioned the conflictual relationship between peasants and agricultural labourers, which would weaken the peasant organisation if they were brought together. Hence, EMS advocated a separate trade union for labourers. The trade union and Karshaka Sangham must work to avoid potential conflicts between peasants and labourers. Moreover, these organisations must work to realise the common interests of peasants and agricultural labourers stemming from their 'common experience of poverty and oppression'.[241] Although the conflict between the two classes was not explicitly mentioned in the 1937 article, EMS had acknowledged earlier that the agrarian proletariat suffered oppression from all classes, chiefly determined by caste.[242] While the disunity between peasants and agrarian proletariat was closely interlinked to the social factor of caste, EMS anticipated that the shared economic experience of poverty and class oppression could bring them together. In subsuming the social under secularised, economic category, what is disregarded is the continuance of pre-existing social dynamics between communities.

[240]Namboodiripad, 221.
[241]Namboodiripad, 221.
[242]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar," 206.

Caste continued to govern social relations among the agricultural communities, and it became manifested in untouchability and agrestic slavery in Malabar and the rest of Kerala. It has already been mentioned that even upper-caste tenants with smaller landholdings relied on hired labour, including slave labour, for cultivation.[243] Although slavery had been abolished by law in British India in 1843, we see references to Pulaya bonded slaves in Ponnani and Valluvanad;[244] and the many slave castes and tribes in the hill tracts of Chirakkal taluk.[245] Contemporary observers, including Karshaka Sangham organisers like Keraleeyan, reported that slavery was rampant in Malabar, with enslaved people rented out to smaller cultivators by *jenmi*s for a fixed amount of *paattam* (rent). However, for EMS, slavery primarily was manifested in the 'vestigial' practices of rent, such as *vishuvekkal* (the practice of offering a portion of the harvest to the *jenmi* while renewing land tenure).[246] However, EMS would consider 'Harijans' as 'serfs if not actual slaves' by 1940, but there was no analysis of slavery.[247]

Here, it is pertinent to bring in Paul's observation of the Marxian tendency to interpret slavery as serfdom and how it renders slavery invisible in history writing.[248] Alongside slavery, untouchability and other caste discrimination practices were alive in early-twentieth century Malabar and thus provided a strong foundation for the divergent interests between peasants (of all classes) and agricultural labourers. Karshaka Sangham would resort to blocking caste-based services ('social boycott') as a pressure tactic on the *jenmi*s in Malabar.[249] Thus, EMS overlooked the existence of caste dynamics shaping the social relations between the categories he termed peasants and agricultural labourers. Instead, he argued that the trade union of agricultural labourers and the Karshaka Sangham must work to avoid potential conflicts and bring them together for issues emerging from their shared experience of poverty and oppression. I argue that EMS's negligence of caste in his conceptualization of the idea of the peasant

[243]Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, 32.
[244]P. Narayanan Nair, "Ivarkku Mochanamillenno?," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, May 2, 1932, 8.
[245]Keraleeyan, "Kurumulaku Krishikkar," 11; "'Adimathozhilali Sanghadana"; E. K., "Nirakshararaaya Karshakar," 16.
[246]Namboodiripad, "Malabarile Krishikkar," 206.
[247]EMS Namboodiripad, *History, Society and Land Relations: Selected Essays*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2010), 173.
[248]Vinil Paul, *Adimakeralathinte Adrishyacharithram*, 1st ed. (Kottayam: D C Books, 2021), 41.
[249]Nair, "Malabarile Karshaka Prasthanam," 6.

and the working of the Karshaka Sangham was because of his faith in the redeeming power of class consciousness. Therefore, according to EMS, even if caste tendencies appeared among peasants, they would disappear naturally once class consciousness is cultivated. Thus, EMS claimed in a 1943 pamphlet on the history of peasant movements that despite caste not being part of the programme of the Karshaka Sanghams, there was a significant change in the outlook and mode of social interaction among peasants. EMS connected this change to the class solidarity of peasants and argued that class ideology was the best way to counter caste than struggles like the temple entry movement.[250]

At this point, EMS distinguished between class-based movements and identitarian movements. The basis of this distinction for EMS was peasant class consciousness. This distinction was implicit in EMS's characterisation of mobilisations of class-conscious peasants vis-a-vis those motivated by what he termed 'communal interests'. This distinction was made in the analysis of the nature of the Malabar Rebellion. According to EMS, at the core of the Rebellion was the discontent of impoverished peasants on the verge of famine and conditions akin to food riots.[251] The Rebellion became 'communal' when the colonial officials sowed the seeds of hatred between Muslims and Hindus. More importantly, the peasants let themselves be influenced by such hatred campaigns, owing to their lack of *athma bodham* (literally, 'consciousness of the self', i.e., peasant/ class consciousness).[252] Although the peasants in Malabar were fighting the landlords and colonial government, their espousal of religious ideology made EMS characterise them as 'spontaneous' mobilisations and exclude them from being 'authentic' peasant struggles.

EMS argued that it was necessary to distance the non-peasant (upper-class) elements, such as landlords and moneylenders, from the local Karshaka Sanghams because their presence may weaken the peasant struggle.[253] Large landowners could only align themselves with the peasants by becoming labouring human beings. EMS distinguished between the class of landlords engaged in agriculture and those of idle,

[250]Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," 65–66.
[251]Namboodiripad, "Malabarlahala Karshaka Lahalayano?," 110–11.
[252]Namboodiripad, 111.
[253]Namboodiripad, "Krishikkar Sanghadikkedath Ethinu, Engane?," 223.

parasitic landlords. Here, we can see EMS carrying over the framework of labour invoked during the reform days to the peasant question. As a reformer, EMS had urged the Namboothiri community to shed their false sense of honour and take up work — be it as a lawyer, farmer, factory worker or scavenger – to earn their means of livelihood than devour the fruits of the labour of others. As an organiser of Karshaka Sangham, EMS cautioned against the inclusion of *jenmis* and money lenders, who, as exploiters of labour of others, lacked the class consciousness of peasants. Labour thus shaped human consciousness, and a landlord or money lender, who did not labour, lacked the class consciousness of the peasant. Hence, their presence in Karshaka Sanghams may only be detrimental to the realisation of the interests of the peasants.

At this point, let us consider the categories included in the definition of the peasant, viz. 'the intermediary peasant'. To understand the particulars of this inclusion, it is pertinent to understand EMS's analysis of the nature of land relations in Malabar by applying Marxian categories.

Nature of Land Relations in Malabar

While articulating many of his intellectual concerns, including his analysis of land relations, peasants and their issues, EMS always went back to the roots - as in the origins and the evolution of human beings and their developments and their relationship with land. This was informed and moved by European thinking traditions. This was true of other Marxist thinkers like K Damodaran too. Here, EMS's intellectual enquiries as a member of the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Report (1940) are of interest to us.[254] The Committee was formed to study and report the amendments in the existing laws, viz., Malabar Kuzhikkoor Chamaya Act (1900) and Malabar Kudiyayma Act (1930). The Committee sought to study the 'origin and nature' of land relations in Malabar (including *jenmam* and *kanam*) and their different variations. This exercise was perceived as a 'historical' investigation.[255]

[254]EMS Namboodiripad, "Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Reportile Bhinnabhiprayakkurippu," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1938-42)*, ed. T. Sivadasa Menon, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 2006), 295–333.
[255]Nair, "Kudiyayma Committee Mumbake Enthellam Thelivukalaanu Samarppikkendath."

However, EMS found fault with the report and wrote the *Minute of the Dissent*. According to the *Minute*, the report addresses short-term problems and not 'fundamental questions' of the nature of landlordism – whether it performs any socially beneficial role and whether the parasitic nature of landlordism is desirable for society. EMS found that the report implicitly accepted the continuance of landlordism and the need for legislation that fits within the feudal framework. EMS's *Minute*, on the other hand, was guided by Marxist categories and drew on studies and reports by colonial officers, including William Logan, Charles Turner and TV Madhava Rao; Indian Industrial Commission Report (1916-18), as well as the book *Wealth* by English economic historian Edwin Cannan. The document also drew from the ideas of Congress Socialists and communists and the ideology and praxis of the All-India Kisan Sabha. EMS specifically mentioned how the speeches made by leaders on agrarian issues in different parts of India at a 'cadre school' in Sonepur, Bihar provided a preliminary idea of theoretically linking the agrarian question in Malabar with landlordism.[256] The ideas EMS developed in this *Minute* informed his subsequent analyses of the peasant problems and movements and provided the foundation for the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957.[257]

The *Minute of the Dissent* described the fundamental shifts in property and the social relations in Malabar, from feudalism to capitalism. This resulted in the transformation of a flexible system governed by customs and hereditary status to a rigid order governed by law and contractual relations between people.[258] In pre-colonial times, the *jenmi* and the tenant were governed by certain mutual rights and obligations. In return for the rights and privileges enjoyed, the *jenmi* offered social, political, and cultural services. The *jenmi* could not arbitrarily evict the tenant, nor could he engage in rack-renting. Besides, the relationship between the *jenmi* and the tenant exceeded the economic one. Here, we can read EMS's evaluation of pre-colonial *jenmi*-tenant relations as benign and benevolent, an observation made by Dilip Menon to characterise EMS's assessment of caste system and landlordism. Menon also characterises EMS's view of caste as instrumentalist. The problem with such an

[256]Namboodiripad, "Munnettathinte Adyavarshangal," 74.
[257]Namboodiripad, "Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Reportile Bhinnabhiprayakkurippu," 295–96.
[258]Namboodiripad, 300–302.

approach is treating caste 'as if it were devoid of all connotations of ritual and social lowliness'.[259]

The arrival of the modern conception of private property through British colonial land settlement policies eroded the social, cultural, and political roles of the *jenmi* and offered new unrestricted rights on the landed property he held. Besides, land tenures were accorded fixity and rigidity, and the relationship between the *jenmi* and the tenant became purely economic. Although these shifts were part of the arrival of capitalism, EMS identified a fundamental contradiction in the process. While British power demolished the power of landlords in the social-political-cultural realms, it established landlordism in a new arena:

> Here is the great contradiction in history that while the British power destroyed feudalism in its social, political and cultural aspects, it installed it (where it did not exist) and strengthened it (where it existed) in its legal aspects; that, while the British administrative system dethroned the political power of the native feudal nobility, while it supplanted the old medieval culture with its own culture, while it subjected the native feudalism to its economic domination, it strengthened the landlords who should naturally have been completely done away with by it.[260]

In his 1943 pamphlet on peasant movements, EMS rephrased the contradictions of capitalism thus: the British regime gave a 'stunning blow' to the pre-colonial society consisting of the political superstructure (formed by the feudal rajas) and the cultural superstructure (formed by Namboothiris and religious institution). At the same time, elements from the old superstructure became part of the new economic base.[261]

This contradiction is crucial because it led to the rise of the new bourgeois class, and EMS describes the emergence of this class in his writings. While the erstwhile political elite (*rajahs*) and the Namboothiris were content with their newly gained economic and social predominance under colonialism, their dependants and tenants secured modern education and entered modern professions. The richer among this 'rising bourgeoisie' of the non-cultivating, middle tenant group (*kanakkar*) became

[259]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 54–55.
[260]Namboodiripad, *History, Society and Land Relations*, 163.
[261]Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Karshaka Prasthanathinte Oru Laghu Charithram," 31.

powerful as they won concessions from the colonial state chiefly, viz. fixity of tenure through the 1930 tenancy law.[262] This ended the epoch of the feudal *jenmi* and emerged the epoch of the bourgeois rent receiver.[263] In a 1949 article, EMS argued that the big *jenmi* was further weakened by the crises brought by World War I and the attendant Great Depression of 1929.[264] It caused the pauperisation of many *jenmi* households and the enhancement of a few who acquired the land of the said landlord section.[265]

If the big landowning tenants and the *jenmi*s were in opposite camps during the tenancy movement, they began to unite later. Having won the battle with the promulgation of the tenancy law, the big tenant turned against the lower-level tenants and essentially functioned in the same feudal framework as the *jenmi*s. The only difference was that if the *jenmi* had wanted to retain his 'traditional rights', the new bourgeoisie landlord wanted profit for his investment in land. Soon, the *jenmi* and the bourgeoisie class realised their shared interests and began functioning together. In EMS's analysis, Malabar's agriculture was semi-feudal and semi-capitalist. Hence, EMS argues that the peasant movement must not limit its aims to ending landlordism; it must also fight capitalist exploitation. It must demand the nationalisation of land and establish a socialist order of collective farming.[266]

In 1943, EMS argued that the abolition of landlordism and conferring land rights to tenants would improve the living conditions of the peasants, resolve the problem of peasant indebtedness, contribute to the growth of agriculture, and indirectly result in the development of the industry. In 1949, using the Marxist-Leninist framework, EMS stated that the abolition of landlordism alone would not improve the life of peasants. Only a 'fundamental agrarian revolution' aiming for a socialist order can liberate peasants. Towards this end, EMS reimagined a broader revolutionary front consisting of

[262]Namboodiripad, 31–33.
[263]Namboodiripad, 49.
[264]EMS Namboodiripad, "Keralathile Kisan Prashnam," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1947-49)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 8 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1999), 305–20.
[265]Namboodiripad, 314.
[266]Namboodiripad, 313–19.

poor peasants, intermediary peasants and agrarian proletariat fighting the *jenmi* and the agricultural capitalist.[267]

What is particular about this shift is that EMS called for the inclusion of 'intermediary peasants' in the struggle against semi-feudal, semi-capital exploitative practices. Rather than being an abrupt change, this move must be seen as part of the CPI policy. In 1945, Communist Party had distinguished landlords with more than 100 acres of land and those with less than that.[268] The Party called for the confiscation of land from those *jenmi* households possessing more than 100 acres. Among other things, the policy allowed smaller *jenmi*s to evict tenants from a certain percentage of land for agriculture and other livelihood needs. This was widely criticised by Congress and other parties and was termed a ploy by EMS Namboodiripad to help the smaller *jenmi*s. In this context, EMS argued that the enemy of the Communist movement was big landlords who owned more than 100 acres of land. They were the biggest hoarders apart from being the moneylenders and capitalists. The big landowners also formed one of the central pillars of imperialism in India. Instead of alienating small-scale *jenmi*s and intermediary peasants, EMS calls for an approach that treats them as allies in the fight against the big landlords.[269]

A 1946 article that explained and clarified the party position fell within the ambit of EMS's Namboothiri reform concerns.[270] For instance, EMS explained that the policy aimed to assist those individuals from big *jenmi* households 'to end their parasitic existence and live like decent beings', engaging in agriculture. The condition Party imposed was that they must do farming either by themselves or with hired labour who are paid wages enough for subsistence. In other words, the Party policy aided the *jenmi*s in becoming 'labouring human beings'. The best way to end landlordism was to provide the conditions necessary for transforming idle *jenmi*s from their parasitic existence to a

[267]Namboodiripad, 319–20.
[268]EMS Namboodiripad, "Partyude Karshikaparipadiyude Kathal," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1945-46)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 1st ed., vol. 6 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1999), 82.
[269]Namboodiripad, 82–85.
[270]EMS Namboodiripad, "Prathiphalam Kodukkunnathu Jenmithvathe Arakkitturappikkanaanu," in *EMSinte Sampoorna Kritikal (1946-47)*, ed. P Govinda Pillai, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, March2008), 52–54.

dignified human existence.[271] Here, we see a convergence between EMS's reform concerns of 'humanising the Namboothiri' by making them labouring human beings and his ideological commitment to the peasant question and the overthrow of landlordism and capitalist exploitation. EMS thus tried to reconcile the agrarian proletarian movement and the Namboothiri reform concerns.

Ultimately, EMS is talking about a proletarian self that will solve caste and other social hierarchies. In conceptualising this proletarian self, EMS overlooked the contradictions. EMS failed to address the caste tensions between peasants and agricultural labourers, imagining that class consciousness would overcome caste. Similarly, EMS included intermediary landlords (owning lesser than 100 acres of land) in the definition of peasants with the hope that labour would cultivate class consciousness and humanise them. This intellectual manoeuvre is based on EMS's internalisation of the idea of the labouring, Universal Human as the driver of revolutionary social change. Given this ideal, both Namboothiri reform and proletarian movement are coterminous. In EMS's view, these two processes interlock and bring about an egalitarian society. However, in assuming that the uneven social locations of caste resolve themselves with the oncoming of the Universal Human, the social differences are flattened out. The possibility and reality of the resilience of social hierarchies in modern spaces are ignored. Universalism thus allowed a 'neutering' of the history of caste and denied its tangibility and continuity in the present.

Conclusion

EMS's interventions in the changing contours of the public become relevant in how he channels his intellectual energies to re-imagine Kerala as a land where new values of political identities emerge. EMS's role as an interlocutor was to participate and refashion/reframe a new kind of public sphere that led to the making of the organised left in Kerala. One of the critical aspects of the need and emergence of the left public sphere was expanding the idea of the social in a qualitatively different way. Hence, the emergence of a left public sphere can be considered a threshold in the history of modern public spheres in Kerala. In this chapter, we have seen how the shared beliefs of

[271]Namboodiripad, 53–54.

peasants against power structures come together with left discourse and shape a political agenda. One can see that the ideological and intellectual gains that EMS had acquired had deep connections with enlightenment and modernity. Progressivism, revolution, and the idea of the Universal Human are some of the themes that EMS retains and develops in his subsequent intellectual interventions as a communist.

The fundamental notions of social and political equality that EMS was getting initiated into had no longer any reference to the older modernising world, i.e., of an older understanding of foundation that worked with norms of caste, differentiated human values and that worked with notions of the sacred. Instead, for EMS, the Marxist ideology, which undergirds the notion of the universal and the notion of the human goods, uses economic materiality as a marker of development and progress where religion or caste plays no part. As EMS gets initiated into left thought traditions, his idea of the 'Universal Human' expands. From the abstract universal man at the beginning of his intellectual pursuits, the idea of a labouring human becomes central to EMS's interventions as a communist.

We see that EMS had already started talking about the universal from the Namboothiri community than from the left public sphere. So, it is not through the left that he arrives at the Universal Human, but through the larger notions of modernity. In this chapter, we see how EMS modifies the idea of the Universal Human to the idea of labourer and arrives at/through a new analytical category of class and claims to break the caste barrier. However, the new category becomes a means to reinstate the caste hierarchy in society. In the previous chapter, we have seen that EMS had been deeply influenced by the idea of the indolent *jenmi* (Namboothiris), who led an idle life as owners of vast tracts of land and consumed the fruits of the labour of other castes.

The chapter has highlighted EMS's distinct contribution as an intellectual in conceptualising the category of the peasant in the Kerala context. EMS's definition of peasant glossed over the caste-based contradictions. This led to the exclusion of the most labouring agrarian class – the agricultural wage labourers. In this conceptualisation, a revolutionary consciousness surpasses class and communal consciousness. On the other hand, the definition included the labouring class of landlords as 'intermediary peasants'. EMS argued in favour of enabling the

transformation of the now pauperised class of *jenmi*s (vis-à-vis the capitalist landowners who belonged to the rising bourgeoisie, tenant class) into labouring human beings. EMS's justification of CPI land reform policies (if not his role in framing them) made way for the accommodation of Namboothiri reform concerns. Underlying the double move of excluding agricultural labourers and including labouring *jenmis* from theory (the definition of peasant) and praxis (Karshaka Sanghams) was EMS's belief in the concept of the Universal Man. Here, we see the secularisation of caste through the left analytical category of class.[272]

It is essential to consider whether EMS sheds the cultural identity while discussing universalising human or class. It is pertinent to consider here Sudipta Kaviraj's observation that the intellectual engagement with Marxism in India had employed techniques similar to that of traditional Brahminical thinking, especially in terms of its textual nature.[273] Further, Kaviraj observes,

> The Marxist error of transposing class for caste acts as an illustration of this wider tendency in social science thinking. It was this pervasive form of thinking that made the transposition of caste into class possible – turning the European condition of class into the natural form of stratification, turning caste into something strange that required elaboration. Retrospectively, this can be seen as a bizarre kind of strangeness, created by an epistemic property built into the apparatus of fundamental concepts, as if a kind of self-relation to Europe was buried deep in the ordinarily inaccessible core of its very categories: a kind of ineradicable conceptual 'unconscious', a subtle, silent history sitting inside the concepts and pulling explanations in the direction of Europe.[274]

We must also see how EMS's Brahmin cultural identity spills over into his further intellectual interventions in the public sphere, primarily when he engages with the peasant public. As Dilip Menon has argued, the Marxist intellectual frameworks of linearity, such as evolutionism and progressivism, had allowed a 'neutering' of the history of caste and denied its tangibility and continuity in the present.[275] This chapter

[272]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', December 2000, 4256–68.
[273]Sudipta Kaviraj, "Marxism in Translation: Critical Reflections on Indian Radical Thought," in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 190–91.
[274]Kaviraj, 189.
[275]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin', 67.

has shown how the category of the Universal Human leads to the inclusion of *jenmi*s as peasants while excluding the most labouring of classes outside the definition of the peasant. The very act of problematising universalism is being done to expand the scope of this universal philosophy and address the blockages (like caste) that come in midway. Such an approach might help us to understand the failures of the left land reform programme with respect to marginalised communities[276] and the emergence of struggles around land waged by Dalits and Adivasis in contemporary Kerala.[277]

[276]Suma Scaria, 'Changes in Land Relations: The Political Economy of Land Reforms in a Kerala Village', *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 26/27 (2010): 191–98.
[277]Bijoy C. R. and K. Ravi Raman, 'Muthanga: The Real Story: Adivasi Movement to Recover Land', *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 20 (2003): 1975–82; K. T. Rammohan, 'Caste and Landlessness in Kerala: Signals from Chengara', *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 37 (2008): 14–16.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has located a specific trajectory of Kerala's public sphere by mapping the interventions of EMS Namboodiripad within it. It has examined how the changes in the publics EMS engaged had influenced him and how the intellectual has changed the public in which he intervened. In the process, the thesis elucidated how modern ideologies had enabled certain intellectual sensibilities within EMS, thereby allowing him to discover new modern political values for individuals and ultimately for the social collective. The subjective time frames in this study were marked by EMS's intellectual interventions within the Namboothiri publics and the question of peasants that he undertook against the background of the intellectual's transition to communism. These new pathways enabled EMS to translate his social worlds into the modern. Through this, this research attempted to map the agencies of the 'political' — in this case, I mean, identifying the power structures that restricted human engagements within the community and marking the operation of power and oppressive socio-economic relations in society through ideology. It also highlighted aspects of political practices, viz., the public use of reason or 'critique' as public action through intellectual interventions and the subjective disciplinary interpellations marked through ideology that culminated in the making of left subjectivities in Kerala.

New geographies of region/ nation/ villages/ community were constructed through language in the early-twentieth century Malayalam public sphere. A part of the thesis has mapped the nature of transitions in the Namboothiri spaces EMS grew up. The shifts were captured by mapping the dissolution of material and intellectual spaces that EMS grew up in and the emergence of new spaces. EMS began his public interventions by associating with the reform of the socio-political realm of the Namboothiri community and then transformed into a left intellectual and statesman. We attempted to look at the social world inherited by the intellectual and how it influenced the intellectual through his various departures and arrivals. Even when there were changes in EMS's intellectual/ ideological frameworks, specific cultural retentions remained the same. Though linearity was introduced to the intellectual through modern ideologies, there was caste hierarchy in its

practice. As a critical interlocutor of the left in Kerala, such cultural retentions in EMS impacted crucial aspects of left policies that shaped the region. I have specifically highlighted the background of land reforms undertaken by the left governments in Kerala, which has contributed to what is termed the 'Kerala Model of Development'.

Although the unique patterns of economy, society and polity of Kerala came to be termed a 'model' by the late-1970s,[1] by late-1970s, the pattern had a more extended history, consisting of the many ideas, ideologies, practices, and political interventions since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A vital constituent of the Kerala Model is the democratisation of society in which the left political movements have played a significant role.[2] The shared beliefs of the peasant publics against colonial power and the left discourse worked together to shape the political agenda since the late-1930s. Moreover, the left political movements also utilised the state mechanism to achieve economic growth with equality, contributing to the Kerala Model.[3] EMS is regarded as the architect of a critical legislation that aimed to abolish the oppressive landlordism in Kerala and redistribute land to the landless labourers and peasants.[4] There was a history to this law, emerging from EMS's perspective of the peasant-agrarian question in Malabar, expressed through the mobilisation of the masses by the left since the late-1930s.[5] This study has analysed EMS's understanding of the peasant from his deliberations in the public sphere and the potential influences that have shaped his understanding of the problem.

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[1]A set of studies since 1975 has suggested that Kerala, despite its low economic growth, registered high human development indicators compared to other states in India and some of the developing countries. Although this gave rise to the term 'Kerala Model', there also emerged critiques that highlighted the exclusion of women and (other) sexual minorities, marginalised castes and tribes from this development. See P. K. Michael Tharakan, *Kerala Model Revisited: New Problems, Fresh Challenges*, 2006 for an overview of this debate. One must understand this developmental experience as emanating from the particular 'interaction of multiple variables'—spatial, social and material. See K T Rammohan, 'Assessing Reassessment of Kerala Model', *Economic & Political Weekly* 35, no. 15 (8 April 2000): 1234–36.

[2]V. Bijukumar, 'Radicalised Civil Society and Protracted Political Actions in Kerala (India): A Socio-Political Narrative', *Asian Ethnicity* 20, no. 4 (2019): 503–21.

[3]Jayan Jose Thomas, 'The Achievements and Challenges of the Kerala "Model"', Webzine, The India Forum, 2 July 2021, https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/achievements-challenges-kerala-model.

[4]I. S. Gulati and T. M. Thomas Isaac, 'EMS Namboodiripad: Revolutionary Intellectual', *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 13 (1998): 690.

[5]Richard W Franke and Barbara H Chasin, *Kerala: Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State*, 2nd ed. (California: The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1994), 54–63.

EMS's interventions in the public sphere have been recorded by scholars like Dilip Menon, who problematised the intellectual's historical writings for its Brahmin perspectives.[6] Menon contends that EMS's explorations in history were essentially attempts to negotiate his Brahmin identity. Departing from this perspective, this thesis problematises the cultural retentions of EMS using the idea of the 'protean Brahmin self', which inflected the analytical categories the intellectual employed. EMS believed that caste was a feature of inequality based on class and failed to take on board the questions of the 'social'. The removal or subsuming of cultural and religious identities indicates how older worlds were flattened. For instance, viewing Dalits as Harijans is a way of flattening unequal worlds. Gandhi called them Harijan; EMS called them class. We see here through EMS's intellectual interventions an imposed equality from the top, whereas the view from the ground tells a different story. This thesis has attempted to focus on the social (caste) and see the 'political' through historical processes. It has also established the way in which EMS addressed or approached the question of social equality and looked at its limitations.

In the first chapter, we saw the making and re-making of the self through shifting ideologies that steered EMS towards Marxism. This reorientation was mapped to see how the modern functioned in EMS through the moral sources of the ideologies, thereby shaping new frameworks of thought and action. This working of the modern was captured by primarily marking how EMS became political, a process that had its roots within his interventions in the community. These interventions were against the power structures that restricted 'human beings' to the private and hierarchised realms of the Namboothiri spaces. Later, Gandhian principles provided the moral source to help him struggle against the forces that constrained people under the colonial power structures. And finally, EMS arrived at the Marxian framework, which enabled him to problematise the economic and social forces of society and devise strategies, movements and policies that sought to liberate people from the oppressive structures. The working of the modern was captured by analysing the working of the 'political' through EMS's quests on realising the *idea* of

[6]Menon, 'Being a Brahmin'.

equality. The quest for equality resulted in the shifting frameworks and sources that shaped EMS's *subjective formation* – the self. Seen in this way, the chapter is a biographical account of EMS's intellectual trajectory.

EMS's intellectual frameworks were influenced by the nineteenth-century understandings of religion ('Hinduism') and caste. Gandhian ideas helped EMS navigate between the material and spiritual worlds; ideas like truth, non-violence, and *daridranarayana seva* (service to the poor) gained from the Gandhian framework helped form EMS's praxis and public action on the one hand and corporeality on the other. Although EMS became a critic of Gandhism, the influence of Gandhian ideas remained close to EMS. A significant factor shaping EMS's engagement with Gandhian nationalism was the idea of revolutionary social change emerging from his readings on revolutions in Europe. He became convinced that there was a need for a revolution in Indian social systems. EMS also imbibed the idea of the Universal Human at this time. This took EMS to the writings of Trotsky, Bolshevik revolutionaries and the Russian experience of socialism and Marxism in the 1920s. In the Indian context, Jugantar and Anushilan Samitis helped in the growth of the left ideology in EMS. Gradually, EMS adopted the labour theory of value to see and understand the social world around him. Another important idea that came with Marxism was that of dialectics. EMS adopted this method in his analyses, where he always brought two different ideas into one and came up with a new aspect.

Left political ideas influenced EMS's view of justice, freedom, and liberty. Marxism became a framework to see and understand the world, and these quests gained further momentum through the pursuit of rationality and scientific knowledge and the development of the framework of Universal Human. Thus, a new subjectivity was in the making. One can see the Brahmin influences of thought getting overlapped by the Marxist frameworks. Like Gandhian influences, the left ideology also influenced EMS in conducting himself. The disciplinary interpellations can be seen working in EMS. For instance, *How to be a Good Communist*[7] influenced the communists in India. This disciplining was not only to

[7]Shao-Chi, *How to Be a Good Communist*.

conduct the self but also to perform disciplined work within the party. Along with these, EMS's understanding of the social relations, body and family were informed by evolutionary ideas of progress and monogamous family system by Lewis Henry Morgan and Friedrich Engels' reading of Morgan. He also arrived at the idea of working-class ethics through Engels.

Taking cue from Dasgupta's idea of 'ascetic modality', one can see the shaping of a secular topography of a communist mind clubbed with Gandhian principles in EMS. With the new framework of Marxism, EMS believed that the destruction of the bourgeois social system and construction of the socialist order needed the language of critique of the social systems, economy, politics, and art. Though this thesis has not analysed the language of critique present in his various intellectual interventions, it became the pillar behind EMS's writings till his death. We see that the temporal orientations informed by the ritualistic practices of Namboothiri Brahmin within the private realms of the *illam* were replaced by the modern and linear form of time informed by Marxist notions. All these processes of formation (encounter with new ideologies and becoming a communist) and disciplining a gendered political subject were made possible mainly in the arenas that EMS identified as 'public'. However, it is not that EMS occupied this public sphere and used it to make various ideological interventions. The public that EMS engaged with was inherited and had its particularities. The second chapter deals with the nature of this public sphere that EMS inherited and shaped him and which he also shaped later.

EMS's engagements in the public sphere worked as one of the agents for the shifting frameworks. The structural and cultural retentions of the political subject were made through the newly formed publics. Thus, we looked in detail at the nature of the inherited public spheres of EMS. The chapter focused on the new imaginary of the public constituted by the Namboothiri Brahmins through the Yogakshema Sabha. The emergence of the upper caste, specifically the Namboothiri publics of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, shows how the modern seeped into the worlds of Namboothiri Brahmins. We looked at the transitions of Namboothiri publics, restricted earlier to the temple publics,

learning centres and *matoms* to the modern publics. The new spaces facilitated the rise of reform-oriented Namboothiris, who were instrumental in shaping modern Namboothiri publics such as community associations and print publications.

This period saw changes in the literary sensibilities in the elite print public spheres. Modern ways of intellection and scientific modes of thinking appeared in the print public sphere. Reflections on the possibilities of print as a medium and the associated mode of intervention were done through narrating histories of print journalism from the west. The emerging print modernity of the early twentieth century shaped a new intellectual class that was elite in nature. This new class of intellectuals marked the transition from a worldview corresponding to the sovereign/monarchical socio-political order to a modern subjecthood in the public sphere. These transitions redesigned the forms of power based on language and print. The new category of the 'common people' that emerged through these interlocutions provided one vantage point for the intellectual interventions in the new print public sphere. Thus, the inherited public spheres of EMS did see these articulations of the 'common man'; nevertheless, much more nuanced forms of new categories of the peasant and working-class emerged later in the 1920s.

The caste elites saw multiple possibilities within the new print public to recognise and reflect upon the making of community identities. This process created the categories of modern and pre-modern in its relationship with other caste communities in the society. Part of the developments of the modern Namboothiri public sphere was the formation of Namboothiri identity and consciousness articulated in the print public through different temporal and spatial strategies. It started with the establishment of the community reform organisation Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha. The question of reform was debated 'publicly' and was initiated through the modern print public sphere, primarily through publications like *Mangalodayam* and *Unni Namboothiri*. The Sabha initially focused on reform of rituals, progress through modern education, sovereignty, and wealth for Namboothiris. The Namboothiri print public also worked towards bringing together the Namboothiris who were scattered in different geographies under the organisational

umbrella of the Sabha. The community print sphere also became a platform to discuss the nuances of legality, property, ownership, and the changing nature of the land relations to the Namboothiri Brahmins.

A politics of time constituted a vital factor in the newly emerging upper caste print public sphere, and precisely, the Namboothiri public sphere. In the early-twentieth century, Namboothiris articulated the need to adopt modern values like industriousness and punctuality in the public sphere. We also saw the attempts to bring the spatially and temporally fragmented Namboothiris to a place under a homogenous, singular time by applying representational techniques such as the census. The caste-specific census was pursued through the print public sphere out of anxieties of being left out of modern institutions in the early-twentieth century Kerala. While a section of Namboothiris had begun to come out of the old notions of time and embraced modern time and a future time of prosperity for the community, another section concerned itself with the past. *Mangalodyam*, for example, undertook attempts to collect and preserve 'rare and valuable texts' and gather information about scholarly vernacular texts and requested the active participation of readers in it. This was done as part of looking for their pasts and as part of the project of writing history, and also towards homogenising the Brahmins on a pan-Indian scale. Through these different strategies, a way of 'looking inwards' and identifying themselves as a 'population' arose. Modern education for the Namboothiri Brahmins was the manifestation of modern time. We mapped how Brahmin subjectivity among the Namboothiris was shaped by inversing and negotiating time. I argue that the politics of time from the inherited public spheres familiarised EMS with the linear temporalities, which mediated his adoption of Marxist frameworks.

Having examined the particulars of the inherited public spheres which shaped EMS's initial engagements, chapter III looks at the nature of his interventions in the Namboothiri public sphere. Engagements in the early-twentieth century public sphere were crucial to the experience of modernity for intellectuals like EMS. In the Namboothiri public sphere, which had opened itself to the possibilities offered by the modern, EMS worked with the

rational language of critique. In the process, we see EMS perturbing the given identity of being a Brahmin by espousing the idea of (Universal) human. EMS's interventions within the community happened when the community was polarised into groups termed 'progressives' and 'conservatives'. EMS intervened on behalf of the progressive cause vis-à-vis conservatism and what was understood as tradition. EMS's interventions were also marked by negotiations and interlocutions that reconciled competing schools of thought and blended new ideologies into the Namboothiri reform project. Thus, EMS assimilated concepts and ideas such as 'humanism', 'democracy' and 'labour' in the context of Namboothiri reform. EMS contended that western culture must be welcomed in thought, philosophy, customs, and attire.

The idea of revolution was applied to conceptualise reform in all aspects of social life within the community. Through this, EMS sought to dismantle caste power which, according to him, was the reason for the isolation of the Namboothiris community from the rest of Kerala and the world. This was to be done by eliminating the ritual and corporeal practices which reproduced priestly authority. By vouching for a life of labour, EMS vouched for shedding the 'false' sense of Namboothiri superiority and honour and the community's social position as landlords and its by-product, the idle lifestyle. Therefore, EMS urged the Namboothiris to engage in agriculture, work in factories and undertake entrepreneurial activities. Participation in the modern workforce would result in the Namboothiri community engaging with other caste communities. Another means to end the social isolation of the Namboothiris was through inter-caste marriages. EMS anticipated that through reform of language by adopting Malayalam in place of Sanskrit words, the cultural and linguistic isolation of Namboothiri Brahmins would be ended. In the backdrop of calls for reservation for Namboothiris in employment and other state benefits, EMS exhorted the community to give up privileges. In short, for the structural and attitudinal transformation of the Namboothiri Brahmins, EMS advanced the project of economic, educational, cultural, and ritual reform, and this aligned with the project of 'humanisation of Namboothiris' articulated by radical Namboothiri reformers of the 1920s. In other words,

EMS was calling for the desubjectivation of the Namboothiri self and the fashioning of a new self of casteless, human beings.

Though EMS engages with new frames with a universalist understanding of the human, we saw the continuities of Brahmin social power in his use of the idea of universal human. To explain this, I used the idea of the 'protean Brahmin self'.[8] Understanding the working of a malleable, protean Brahmin self in the public sphere requires us to understand the breakdown of the old order and the coming of the new, hybrid modernity as a simultaneous process. This aspect was mapped through EMS's proposals for the reform of the community. In the reform process advocated by EMS, although the de-ritualisation of the Brahmin individual and community self happens, the power possessed by the Brahmin is retained in the new, modern order. Rather than desubjectivation, a re-subjectivation as modernised Brahmins was in order. In other words, the protean tendencies of the Brahmin self in the public sphere worked towards converting the ritual powers of the Namboothiri Brahmins into a secular power in the emerging Aikya Keralam (United Kerala). I argued that the protean self was at work in EMS's interventions in the community public sphere, and this protean Brahmin individual/community self transforms caste power into a modern form.

The working of the malleable Brahmin self is embodied in the simultaneous programs he proposed within the community: the reforms within (de-ritualisation) and reform without (adoption of new values and practices of labour and rationalisation). EMS's exhortation for the radical rejection of ritualised power of Namboothiris and acceptance of modern ways of being thus sought to furnish power for the community in the fast-changing social world. EMS was clear that the traditional form of authority that was hitherto enjoyed was not practical anymore. EMS stated that even if a small sub-caste defied caste through religious conversion or active non-cooperation or liberation through eradicating untouchability, the Namboothiris would not survive. So, EMS exhorted Namboothiris to adapt to secular ways of being in the modern world and retain power. EMS's exhortations

[8]Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation', 2000.

to Namboothiris arose in the backdrop of the active challenging of caste by contemporary anti-caste movements in Kerala and beyond. EMS employed the narrative of Namboothiris 'losing out' to other castes which were achieving upward mobility in the unfolding modern, capitalist order. This narrative could be interpreted as a strategy to exhort Namboothiris to modernise. This is because EMS was convinced that once Namboothiris transform into labouring human beings and actively participate in a modern social order, caste will disappear. However, the optimistic faith in the redeeming power of universalism failed to account for the resilience of caste in a perfectly secularised, modern world.

In understanding how EMS imagined the community, one can see the amalgamation of how the political community worked as a way of negotiating within the Namboothiris, which gets carried over with his broadening political understandings and the subsequent shift from the community. EMS sought to create a modern rational public within the community through his many intellectual moves and categories. Through his activities of reform in the community, EMS sought to go beyond the idea of 'social' change and make them into a political community. From his focus on humanising Namboothiris, EMS shifts to a broader field of political action consisting of a brief interlude of nationalist and Gandhian activism towards the left political spectrum, from the Congress Socialist Party to the Communist Party.

EMS's public, political interventions and writings as a Marxist intellectual are vast. In the fourth chapter, I focus on EMS's engagement with the peasant question in Malabar, as reflected in his writings on peasants and agrarian questions in the region between 1935 and 1949and relying on secondary literature. EMS belonged to one of the most prominent landowning Namboothiri families in southern Malabar, and it is intriguing to see how he engaged with the peasants, who occupied the other end of the caste-based agrarian social pyramid. More importantly, EMS is remembered chiefly for his analyses of the peasant question that provided the theoretical basis for the series of land reform legislation in Kerala, culminating in the historic Land Reforms Amendment Act in October 1969. This

intervention is considered one of the foundations of the much-celebrated Kerala Model of development.

In contextualising EMS's interventions with respect to peasants, chapter IV first provided an overview of the peasant movements in Malabar. Then the chapter provided a brief history of the left movement in Kerala before focusing on the Communist Party of Kerala's engagement with the peasant-agrarian question in Malabar. The Party's interventions concerning peasants were instrumental in transforming it into a powerful political front in Kerala in the post-independence period. It then outlined the left peasant public sphere, captured in the newspaper edited by EMS in the late-1930s, *Prabhatham*. The newspaper chronicled the activities of the left peasant unions, Karshaka Sanghams, across Malabar. We then moved on to EMS's writings on the peasant question, trying to analyse his understanding of peasants, peasant movements and the nature of land relations that organised social groups in the region.

EMS's writings and interventions on the peasant question represented a change from reformism, wherein he exhorted Namboothiris to become human beings by labouring in the fields and factories. As a left interlocutor, EMS called for the demolition of landlordism and land redistribution to the landless peasant. However, both processes were directed toward forming a socialist society modelled after the Soviet Union. Both processes were predicated on the idea of a universal, labouring human being, a move that secularises caste and community into the new identity of class. However, the conceptualisation of the peasant as a labouring human being devoid of any caste-community ties and the corresponding analysis of the nature of land relations from a purely economic perspective subsumed the larger question of the social from the analysis. Exploitative land relations constituted a larger matrix of the social power of caste, which was multidimensional (social, political, economic, and cultural) in nature.

While rendering the caste-community relations invisible, the abstract figure of the labouring human being works in two different ways in relation to the landowning Namboothiri class and the marginal peasant/ agricultural labourer class. What escaped

EMS's analysis was that the landowning Namboothiri classes/ castes are better placed to take advantage of modernity by transitioning themselves into abstract, labouring human beings than those at the lower levels of the caste-based agrarian society. Thus, the marking of secularising of caste by EMS within the Namboothiri publics worked as a prelude to the interventions within the left public spheres in Kerala. Using the idea of the secularisation of caste, the final chapter thus draws a continuation between EMS's community reform project (humanising the Namboothiris and modernising them) and his Marxist ideological project (conceptualising the abstract labouring human being who demolishes landlordism). Having mapped the working of ideas in an early-twentieth century intellectual, we have seen how the idea of universalism worked as a thought-category through the interventions in the public sphere. Though the idea of universalism is an all-encompassing framework, this thesis intrigues and raises further queries on how one can think of questions like caste to be addressed in the emancipatory politics of universalism.

There are deep intellectual connections between EMS's Marxist interventions and within the national movement. The vision of India as an independent nation-state enshrined in its constitutional framework principles and values, which would set right centuries of socio-political inequalities through the correctional welfare policies. There was, analogous to this, also a profound transformation of individuals into ethical and secular human beings. There was an extremely significant stress on peasants as a class, who would receive the benefits of enlightened and scientific state policies that legislated in the institutions of the peasants while hitting hard on the privileges of landlordism. Despite being influenced by the Soviet Model, EMS espoused and made possible legitimate changes and attempted to pre-empt violent upheavals from the bottom. Nor did he think that the proletarianisation of the peasantry was necessary, and the inevitable class antagonism between the workers and the capitalists (which was ultimately promoted theoretically at least) leading to revolutionary upheaval. The historical context of violent and ever-present peasant unrest in Malabar, and deep-seated causes of peasant restlessness in highly asymmetrical land relations between landowners and peasants, and EMS's initial experiment to combine the Marxist understanding of historical materialism with land

reform as a revolutionary agenda, do not appear fortuitous. The region was home to the Mappilas, singled out in both colonial and nationalist history as fanatics: the fact that it was this same region that experienced radical land reform programmes also could not have been a coincidence. EMS was welding together a peasant class, in which religious and caste identities were incidental.

EMS's intervention could be understood as an imaginative development of a Marxist ideology that advocated the fundamental transformation of the mode of production, and the conditions of the producers, sans revolutionary violence. EMS ultimately retained the Gandhian principles of non-violence and truth, and Gandhian values ruled EMS's vision of radical transformation despite the repudiation of the prioritisation of national movement.

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APPENDIX:

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by Chanthu S

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