



HISTORIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS ON MAHATMA AYYANKALI - A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract:

Literary sources are very important for reconstructing the past. It is essential to understand the socio political, cultural patterns of human beings through the ages. Dalits and their struggles are one of the most important aspects of historical writings in recent times, but they were underrated by the historians of the age. Here, Ayyankali, the social reformer of Kerala, was the real victim of the exclusive process of historical writings.

Introduction:

Historical writings are an essential part of the learning process and one of the most important ways that historians communicate their ideas and conclusions to one another. Today, writings on Dalits are a burgeoning field of study in academia and the major objectives of these are to offer new perspectives. Aim of dalit historical writings recover histories of struggles for human dignity and caste difference by highlighting dalit intellectual and political activism that have acquired new forms in a modern and democratic India. A plethora of literature has been available on different aspects of life and culture of the Dalits. But the survey of available literature clearly reveals that there are only scattered references about the struggles for freedom by the Dalits in India in general and Kerala in particular. It is clearly understood that generally historians deciding what to 'exclude' or what to 'include' in their historical writings. Ayyankali, the social reformer from the very bottom of society, was the real victim of the exclusive process of historiographical writings. Even though he made a series of struggles like *villuvandi yathra*, labour struggle and *kallumala* agitation for the basic freedom of the vast masses, not at all considered by the historians of the age.

Through the *Villuvandi yathra*, Ayyankali intended to create a space in the public sphere by rejecting all the caste laws imposed by the Brahmin hegemonic society. Agricultural agitation or the labour struggle of Ayyankali was a political manoeuvre and bargaining with the government and protest against the dominance of upper castes while exercising absolute control over the expertise and labour skills traditionally acquired by the avarnas. Ayyankali used this struggle for attaining political power which demanded acceptance of humans as social beings. Here labour struggle is considered as an instrument for the attainment of political power which is mainly focused on the legitimate rights of the individual or the oppressed. Through the struggle Ayyankali could control the behavior of the people. Labour struggle of Ayyankali could influence the process of political transition in the democratic process of Kerala and this organized labour force acted as an effective factor in the process of democratization, which gradually gained advance in Kerala. The revolt for education and social status by Ayyankali can be called as the revolt of wisdom. But here let us see how the historians of Kerala saw the first strike in India. The *Kallumala* agitation was an expression of the dominance of women's inner self, sexuality and privacy. When the *avarnas* discarded the stone bead strings (*kallumala*), the symbol of backwardness, their women became confident about their dignity. It also provided the feeling of equality with other women of society and also claimed that no other can dominate the bodies of dalit women. It clearly indicates the importance of *Kallumala* agitation in the history of Kerala.

But the newspapers like *Malayali*, *Nasrani Deepika* and *Mithavadi* reported this incident in their columns. Each paper reported the news differently because they did not give appropriate consideration for the untouchables. *Mithavadi* blamed the Pulayas for these violent incidents. It was the need of the hour to bring about a change in the chaotic situation. More over this incident marked in the history as *Perinadu* Rebellion or *Perinadu* Revolt. Here the question is that what was the socio political accountability of the press and the historians alike towards the aspirations of dalits and their freedom. Even though Ayyankali's struggles were intended for acquiring the right to access public places, the right to education, right of involvement in the economic process and secure social justice of the much oppressed people in Kerala. But it is the fact that he and his struggles were given less attention by the historians of the age. Here this paper analyses how far the writings on Mahatma Ayyankali, highlighted the political motive and the importance of his struggles. If we take the historiographical writings on Kerala, there are much reference on socio- political histories and its makers. Even though there are number of historians wrote about the socio cultural history of modern Kerala where there hardly reference on dalits and their freedom struggles. As we know Sreedhara Menon who he is considered as one of the prominent modern historians. He also wrote about the socio cultural history of Kerala. But anywhere in his writings he does not reach out the dalit confrontations or any references on Ayyankali movement.

Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Nambootirippadu, popularly EMS generally considered as an Indian communist politician and theorist. It is generally accepted that his autobiography is one of the important

historical studies of the life in Kerala during the pre independence years. Auto biographies and biographies can play a major role in the historiographical writings. Because it reflects the historical period in which the person lived and both contains the history of life. Here instead of going deeply into personal emotions EMS managed to depict the social situation in his era. And yet he is not able to give or find anything else but a single line about Ayyankali.

Now the question is that how the Ayyankali movement marked by the historians or the politicians or the theorists of that period? It is sure that the historical writings on Ayyankali and his struggles for dignity and freedom paid less attention or deliberately ignored by the historians of the period. It simply means that these people were less important than others or they were unvalued by the early modern historians. It is the clear indication of the exclusion of historical writings on dalits and their freedom struggles. Actually these excluding process of writings by the elitist historians directly paved the way for erasing dalit history. Dalits in Kerala have been oppressed as well as culturally subjugated and politically marginalized for long years eliminated from the historical references even after their freedom struggles. It is very important to know whom the written record is.

The history of Ayyankali was intentionally written in the 1990s onwards. His history has been written by putting together many of the smallest information mentioned in the different source of information like souvenirs, journals and articles. There are some relevant notes on Ayyankali and his struggles in the form of articles, journals and general references to Kerala. Even the smallest information is important when we write the history of the downtrodden. As the subalterns are often regarded as 'voiceless', it is the bounten duty of the historian to investigate even the smallest information on them.

In 1088 Thulaam the *Vivekodayam* magazine under the leadership of Kumaranassan referred to the name of Ayyankali for the first time. The first article on Ayyankali came out in S.N D P Yogam *Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir* in 1953 and it was written by T. T. Kesavan Sasthri and published under the title *Sree Narayana Guru* on December 1954. Actually the souvenir was a compiling of essays and an article on Ayyankali was added to these essays. It was published by The Circle Book House under the editorial work of P. K. Balakrishnan.

The first biographical article about Ayyankali came out on the day of his 101 birth day celebration. It was written by A. Krishnan Venganoor titled *Sree Ayyankali* and published in the daily *Kerala Koumudi* in 1964. This essay clarified that he was born on August, 1863 and it is considered to be an authentic one. There was no detailed narration on Ayyankali in this article. *Mahacharitha Samgraha Sagaram* written by Pallippattu Kunju Krishana gives a little biographical sketch on Ayyankali. These notes have a lot of errors in it. It was published by E. K. Reghurama Chandran an advocate at Alappuzha in the year 1965. A famous poem entitled *Ayyankali* written by Kallada Sasi was published as a small book in November 1965. The importance of the book is that the revolt of Ayyankali at Araalummoodu and Perinadu was vividly described as a preface. The book has nothing more to offer about the life and career of Ayyankali. The first volume of the *Encyclopedia* published in 1970 contains a biographical note on Ayyankali.

In the academic sector Ayyankali and his struggles also has become the subject of serious study for the academicians as well as the layman. In 1972 there was a publication named *Charithram* published under the editorship of Dr. C. K. Karim where we can find some serious articles on Ayyankali. Ayyankali and his struggles became a matter of serious study in a scientific manner through the works of P.K. Balakrishnan. His first volume of *Keralacharithram* was published in 1973 and he used *Mithavadi* references to write this first volume of the book. The book deals with the biography of Ayyankali in a classical method. *Ormakaliloode*, the autobiography of M. M. Varkey, published in 1974 to include an article named *Ayyankali*.

The article *Adasthithante Adithyathe Pradinidhi* was a brief summary of the five orations of Ayyankali by Jayaprakash. *Mahanaya Niyamasabha Samajikan* by Kalasanan, *Feudalisathinethirepottiveena Aadyatheavalokanam* by Divakaran etc vividly presented Ayyankali who surpassed the ages and succeeded in transforming his community. There is a poem by K.K.S entitled *Malanadinte Mattoli* about Ayyankali. Kallada Sasi has edited and published a text titled *Sree Mulam Praja Sabhayil Sree Ayyankaliyude Prasangangal*. It was the compilation of six orations of Ayyankali in Sree Mulam Praja Sabha and the oration of P.K. Govindan the first representative of Pulaya to the Sree Mulam Praj Sabha.

Social Structures and Political Development in Kerala by R.R.Nair cites a few instances regarding the struggles of Ayyankali. Jayadevan, the famous Dalit cultural activist and the leader of the Harijan International published *Ayyankali Souvenir* in January 1979. It was a worthwhile text and it tells us about the happy moments in the life of Ayyankali. He has translated articles about Ayyankali, and presented them to Ambedkar at Allahabad and one of these articles has been included in Ambedkar's *The Riddle of Hinduism*. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, Venganoor branch published an Ayyankali souvenir titled *Ayyankali Smarakopaharam* in 1979 in connection with the commemoration of Ayyankali. Jayadevan in his article speaks of the comments and views made by Ambedkar on Ayyankali's precious service which made vast ripples among the harijans of India.

In 1989 a souvenir was published with the title of *Panchajanyam*. Padma Sekhar, the President of Pulayar Mahasabha Sabha, was the chief editor of the book and published from Thiruvalla. An article in it tells us that a long time will be taken for the development of the weaker sections in India. This article claims that

before the establishment of the organization of *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam* there was another organization, named *Admeeya Mahajana Sangam* which worked for fifteen years.

In 1995 a book was published with the title *Ayyankali Guru Ganangal and Panchami Smrithi Ganangal*. There were fifty one songs in it and it was written by Padmasekhar. In 1983 Thekkum Bhagam Mohan has written the column *Urayoorunna Charithrangl* which contains four articles about Ayyankali's historical revolt. *Oruvilluvandiyum Kure Lahalakalum, Kallumala Lahala, Pulaya Lahala* were those four articles. C. I. C. Book House published these essays as a book with the title *Adima Garjanam*. The article titled *Ayyankalippada* tells us about the period after the death of Ayyankali. The drama *Ayyankali* written by P.M. Antony is an addition to the literature of Kerala. This book was published by Indian Atheist Publishers, New Delhi.

N.K. Jose popularly known as Dalit Bandhu is a leading Dalit writer who published six books about Ayyankali. They were published in a span of twenty years. His works are *Pulaya Lahala* (1982), *Ayyankali* (1988), *Ayyankaliyude Matham* (1994), *Ayyankali Jayanthi* (2000), *Ayyankali Oru Samagra Padanam* (2002) etc.

In 1986 K.K.S. Das published *Ayyankali Kerala Charithrathil*, analysing Ayyankali's deeds. Besides the above, Ayyankali and his life and struggles have formed the theme of historical articles in several compilations on Kerala History.

Protestant Christianity and People's Movement in Kerala 1850- 1936 by Rev. Dr. Gladston has discussed Ayyankali Movement and presented many printed evidences to prove the writer's arguments. He has collected the reports of the then Protestant missionaries of Kerala. Records from Sree Mulam Praja Sabha are used in plenty to substantiate his arguments, but there is a lack of a theoretical and conceptuable basis of presentation.

In recent years, some scholars and writers have paid their attention to the Dalit Movements as one which acted as a vanguard of social protests and struggles for social justice in India. They began to concentrate more on the neglected areas of historical movements and the subaltern struggles. Likewise Ayyankali movement became the subject of study.

Ayyankali by C.Abhimanyu is a work in Malayalam which provides a better historical background. He was the first scholar to write a thorough biographical work of Ayyankali and it was written with extreme care to meet the needs of a research study as demanded by our times. However this book deals with some of the historical incidents in a partial manner and as a biography of Ayyankali, it is incomplete. Moreover, he did not succeed in objectively analyzing the causes for the disintegration of *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam* founded by Ayyankali.

T H P Chentharassery, the well known historian, wrote about the most neglected areas of history. His biographical study of the social reformer and activist entitled *Ayyankali* which was regarded earlier as an authentic historical work. But in course of time it came to be estimated as offering a wide reading experience when compared to historiographies written in a historical perspective.

Cherayi Ramdas authored an authentic work on Ayyankali entitled *Ayyankalikka Adarathode* which is of tremendous use to researchers who pursue the activities and contributions of Ayyankali. With a researcher's analytical perspective and intellectual acumen he subjected the struggles of Ayyankali providing adequate historical evidence and details of years and periods in which they occurred. He took pains to correct mistakes and lapses made by other historians who wrote about Ayyankali. His book is a remarkable contribution to Ayyankali studies and its ongoing re-reading.

Kunnukuzhi S. Mani wrote and published the book *Pulayar through Centuries* with the financial support of the Cultural Department of Government of Kerala. This book includes a brief biographical sketch of Ayyankali and published in 1989.

K. Saradmoni's *Emergence of Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala* provides an account of the resurgence of Pulayas in the social sphere of Kerala. The book gives detailed analysis of the socio political reforms and economic changes which took place during the period. Even though such reforms brought about changes in the life of these people, the gap between the upper castes and these people has widened over the years. Anyway Saradmoni does not go into the details of the course of the Ayyankali Movement.

Affirmative Action and Social Change: Social Mobility of Dalits by J. Prabhash is the study of the efforts of reservation on scheduled castes in Kerala. It analyses the Dalit mobilization process in the pre independent period in Travancore. It also makes the constitutional scheme of reservation. The book also examines the extent of the mobility of Scheduled Caste in educational, occupational, economic and political realms. The book highlights the need and importance of social consolidation and political mobilization for the emancipation of SC's in general (Prabhash J 2013, 33).

From the above references we can understand that there are numerous writings on Ayyankali and his struggles. However, there are only a few in depth analysis in a historical context and the true nature and importance of the Ayyankali Movement in the Indian social context are little explored. Most of the writings are fanciful narratives based on hero-worship. Some of the most significant episodes in the life and struggles of

Ayyankali have been depicted in these exaggerated narratives. Most of them lack scientific methodological approach or critical analysis on a historical perspective.

Conclusion:

Obviously it is true that there are some recent studies on Ayyankali in the academic and public spheres. Some of them have attempted to offer serious studies on Ayyankali and his struggles. Some concentrate on the theoretical aspects of his struggles. Nevertheless the significant dimensions of the Civic Rights struggles of Ayyankali and his activism for social justice and human rights have not been fully studied in historical contextualization and theoretical perspectives. The close affinity between democratic process and the activism of Ayyankali has also not been taken seriously so far. The present available writings on Ayyankali have never fully attempted to analyze and evaluate Ayyankali's struggles in their true historical, democratic and theoretical perspectives. So it is the responsibility of the historian and the academia to take initiatives to write the most eliminated history or to promote inclusive history.

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