

# KERALA'S NEW MODERNITY

Relevant for: History & Culture | Topic: Social & Cultural Awakening in the First half of the 19th Century

Recreating the classic 'mohalle ki Diwali' on Digital?

Written by B Rajeevan

In the history of Indian renaissance, Ayya Vaikunda Swami is seldom mentioned. Raja Rammohan Roy, called the father of renaissance in India, led a modern, upper-class establishment that catered to the already dominant neo-savarna peoples of north India. Around the same period when Roy's Brahma Samaj came into being, Vaikunda Swamikal established the "Samathwa Samaj (egalitarian society)". Notice the distance between names bleeding into variations in meaning.

Distinguishing himself from Roy, Vaikunda Swamikal marked, as the foremost enemy of his people, the colonial powers; as his other enemy, he marked the landlord, who acted as proxy to the colonialists. By moving against the modernities of both colonialism and feudalism, he conceptualised an ethical world constituted by a subaltern "alternative modernity". But after Independence, when the calculations of Indian politics converted the Nadar community of south Travancore into a subaltern vote-bank, the stature of Vaikunda Swamikal was relegated to one of a mere caste-guru.

Sri Narayana Guru also stood against the ruling alliance of colonialists and neo-savarnas, which dominated Kerala's subaltern classes. He helped bring about an alternative modernity that could substitute both colonial modernity and the domestically grown liberal-capitalist modernity.

While [Mahatma Gandhi](#) led the freedom struggle by placing Indian capitalists at the forefront, Guru led his subaltern reformation by placing Ezhava new rich at its forefront. While the force of Indian capital knocked Gandhi aside, the Ezhava capitalist class fully pilfered Narayana Guru from the subaltern classes. Gandhi's despair, which heightened in the immediate years preceding Independence, was similar to the despair of Guru during his final years. The infiltrators mutated the SNDP Yogam into an instrument for self-preservation; they transformed the ethics of Narayana Guru into a programme that they utilised for bolstering neo-savarna codifications. Evidence of this can be located in the letters written by Narayana Guru to Dr Palpu.

The Ezhava neo-savarna capitalist class, which took over Kerala renaissance process, also conspired to take control over the SNDP Yogam. They relegated Palpu, the founding leader of the SNDP, into a solitary life and even madness.

Even though renaissance processes have been sabotaged in many ways, they continue to reverberate through the class struggles of Kerala. The influence of the Sri Narayana establishment on the CPI-led Punnappra-Vayalar struggle is obvious. The SNDP, under R Shankar's leadership, was with (Travancore dewan) C P Ramaswamy Iyer. After this, Shankar and Nair Service Society founder Mannathu Padmnabhan (Mannam) came together to form the Hindu Mahasabha. The diary entries of Mannam reveal the close ties he maintained with RSS leader M S Golwalkar. Hindu Mahasabha signalled the sabotaging of subaltern upliftments by the neo-savarna capitalist class. After this, we see religious and social organisations moving against subaltern political projects.

After the victorious culmination of the Liberation Struggle (against the EMS government in

1959), the gulf between the elite and subaltern classes was forgotten; renaissance was presented as a liberal-cultural enterprise that worked along the formation of modern Kerala. This way, renaissance began to be portrayed as a gradual march, by a unified body politic. This has now resulted in the brute takeover of Kerala's renaissance by the likes of (SNDP leader) Vellapally Nateshan and (NSS chief) Sukumaran Nair. The renaissance has now been surrendered to the Sangh Parivar.

One contemptible part of this story is that the progressive, scientific or cultural entities, claiming to be resisting this process, are unable to breach the very boundaries constructed by the elites. As a result, they have altered Kerala's renaissance, turning it into a homogenous, liberal-progressive enterprise, weakening its political thrust. Such a history of reform will never aid in the formation of solidarities with the subaltern histories of Kerala.

It is against the background of these contrasting tendencies of Kerala renaissance that we can understand the existence of a new humanism that had arisen during the floods, and the immediate arousal of communal sentiments. The new humanism that has been born through young people, labourers, and women can illuminate the alternative modernity shaped by the actions of Vaikunda Swamikal and Sri Narayana Guru. The Sangh Parivar will falter at this advance. Therefore, there is a need to abandon the obsolete liberal-progressive, rationalist, and scientific approaches. Then we will be capable of nurturing the forces inherent in an alternative modernity.

*Rajeevan is a well-known critic and social historian. Excerpted from the essay 'Post-Flood Humanism and the Essence of Kerala's Reformation' Translated from Malayalam by Ajin K Thomas*

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crack