

CHAPTER IV

SAHODHARAN AYYAPPAN AND RATIONALISM

Among the leaders of Rationalist Movement Sahodharan Ayyappan occupied the most prominent position. The spirit of rationalism germinated in his mind out of the socio-religious restrictions and disabilities imposed upon the non-caste Hindus. He was totally against untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability. He never wanted to discriminate people in the name of caste, creed and colour. He was a staunch advocate of the universal brotherhood transcending the narrow limits. The term Sahodharan itself speaks that he is a brother to all. The journal entitled Sahodharan became the mouth piece of his radical ideas. He gathered inspiration from the cult of rationalism propounded by the great rationalist thinkers.

Similarly he became instrumental in the publication of *Yuktivadi* under the auspices of Mitavadi C.Krishnan.¹ Mrs. Aisha Gopalakrishnan, the daughter of Sahodharan Ayyappan made it clear that the slogan of the key work of the journal *Yuktivadi* was written by Sahodharan Ayyappan himself.² Rationalism is after all the weighing of evidence by clear thinking and sifting truth from falsehood in all matters amenable to investigation.

Rationalists emphasize reasons in one way or another, either in the sphere of knowledge or in the sphere of ethics. *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* says, "Rationalism is the view that reason, as proposed to, say, since experience, divine revelation or reliance on institutional authority, plays a dominant role in our attempt to gain knowledge. The common application of the term 'rationalist' can say little about what two philosophers have in common."³

In third century B.C., Stoicism got much attention as the proto-type of rationalism. It was a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium. They believed that knowledge can be attained through the use of reason and truth can be distinguished from fallacy. Epictetus was a major philosopher and Marcus Aurelius was an emperor who followed the stoic philosophy. Contradiction between determinism and free will lies in the thought as its limitations.⁴ In the words of Sahodharan Ayyappan “a rationalist may be a believer in God, or may not be. Rationalism is only a way of thinking. It is the way to reach the right conclusion.”⁵

The history of rationalism dates back to the middle period of Plato’s writings, at a time when he was thought to have reached the peak of genius. The theory of rational outlook is discussed in several compositions that are known as Plato’s dialogues’. Plato’s philosophy is rationalistic in the sense that it holds a rational knowledge of the universe to be possible, as well as in the sense that the source of knowledge lies in reason and not in sense perception. Experience, however, plays an indispensable role in knowledge. His philosophy is realistic in that it affirms the existence of extra – mental realities, forms or ideas. He is an idealist in that he conceived this world as an ideal realm transcending the particular things in shape and time. He is a phenomenalist in that the sense world is reduced to the status of phenomena or appearances of the real world. He is an anti-materialist in that he refuses to equate reality with the physical world.⁶ Aristotle classified sciences as logical doctrines and was also part of his metaphysics. The categories are the fundamental and indivisible concepts of human thought.⁷ In Aristotalian sense, metaphysics is definable as the one which investigates the nature of being, that is of substance. Sahodharan Ayyappan followed an uncompromising attitude against dogmatism. He stood for free and independent thinking based on the conscience.⁸

Modern rationalism is closely linked to philosopher's such as Rene Descartes (1596-1650), Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). A key figure in western rationalism was Descartes. On the one hand, he recommended that all traditional and inherited ideas be subjected to doubt, a kind of intellectual quarantine, and be awarded certificates of clearance only if they were found logically compelling to the mind. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the programme of Descartes's rationalism was implemented, among others, by the school of 'British empiricists', of whom the greatest was probably David Hume. Hume basically considered thinking to be nothing but the after-tastes of sensations. Thinking of a given object was like having an aftertaste of a dish when one is no longer eating'.⁹

Immanuel Kant has been regarded as the most important modern philosopher. According to Kant, empiricism and rationalism both had failed to explain knowledge because both of them were based on a common assumption concerning the status of objects. According to both of them, things as objects of knowledge exist external to the mind. The mind therefore, has to approach them in order to know them. "Kant was most anxious to show that there are *a priori* elements in knowledge which are not derived from experience and yet which help in increasing empirical knowledge. This is the real meaning of the synthetic judgment *a priori*, that is, according to Kant, there are elements which increase our knowledge (i.e., synthetic) without being empirical (i.e., *a priori*), or, there are universal and necessary cognitions without being analytical. However, the central point of Kant lies that *a priori* elements serve to increase empirical knowledge. So some elements in knowledge have to be derived from experience. This condition is not observed in metaphysics, according to Kant. In metaphysics we deal with the supersensible entities like God, immortal self, the cosmos etc. None of these objects can be experienced. So the *a priori* principles are not applicable to them. Therefore, according to Kant, metaphysics as a science is not possible".¹⁰

Rationalism and religious epistemology are two competing mode of thoughts. Thus there arose the “question of whether or not it is rational to believe in the existence of God is one of the most important question. The answers to this question, whether positive or negative, will have profound importance for how we understand our world, and for how we live and act. It would not be an overstatement to say that it is our duty as rational human beings to confront the god question given the enormous implications the answer carries for human existence. Most people, of course, at one time or another make some attempt to consider seriously the issue of the rationality in the belief in god. If one comes to think that it is rational to believe in the existence of God, then one must attempt to discover meaning and purpose of human life as planned by God. If one comes to accept that God does not exist, then one must attempt to come to terms with consequences of this view, that there is no larger personal scheme of things in which human life makes sense”.¹¹

The division of rationalism and empiricism has played a major role in moulding the out look of Sahodharan Ayyappan. The major philosophers of the period are regularly grouped into two sets of three: Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz are the continental rationalists, in opposition to Locke, Berkeley and Hume, the British empiricists. When taken up “independently of the historical accuracy of the classification”, the terms ‘rationalist’ and ‘empiricist’ are associated with some basic claims which define the family resemblance of each category. Sahodaran Ayyappan translated the writings of great thinkers like Voltaire, Thomas Paine, J.S.Mill, Hohn Morley, Bertrand Russel, H.G. Wells etc., and derived inspiration from such philosophers.¹² Empiricism and rationalism exhaust all possibilities - either knowledge can only be acquired after experience or it is possible to acquire at least some knowledge before experience. There are no third options here (except, perhaps, for the skeptical position that no knowledge is possible at all), so everyone is either a rationalist or an empiricist when it comes to their theory of knowledge.

Marx's rationalism and the critique of religion is very prominent and dominant part in this debate. His 'Contribution of the Critique of Hegel's philosophy of Right' in 'On Religion' says that religion is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, the soul of the soulless environment".¹³ Here he pointed out that the oppressed and their refuge in the fold of religion which would give them "illusory happiness"¹⁴ and "consolation helped them to put with their misery". On the subject of culture and consciousness, Marx said that; "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter along with this their real existence, their thinking, and the products of their thinking".¹⁵ He also mentioned this idea as follows: "What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed?"¹⁶ Sahodharan Ayyappan regarded materialism as better than spirituality.

Marx indicated the connection of religion with social structure and state. Also implied in this statement is the ideological implication of religion which was forcefully articulated in the oft-quoted epigram "religion is the opium of the people". Marx, however, did not use it in contemptuous condemnation like his friend, Moses Hess, who bracketed religion with opium and brandy... The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the value of woe, the halo of which is religion".¹⁷

Here, we try to find out the relationship between rationalism and atheism. 'Is every atheist a rationalist'? If so, 'why is not every rationalist an atheist'? When we look at this matter, we reach some conceptual questions on the theoretical atheism. "Atheism is a complex term to define, and many definitions fail to capture the range of positions an atheist can hold. Perhaps the most obvious meaning to many people now is the belief that there is no God nor

are there gods. However, it has been used in history to denote certain beliefs seen as heretical, particularly the belief that God does not intervene in the world. More recently, atheists have argued that atheism only denotes a lack of theistic belief, rather than the active denial or claims of certainty it is often associated with. This is held to follow from its etymology: it stems from the Greek adjective *atheos*, deriving from the alpha privative *a-*, ‘without, not’, and ‘*theos*’, ‘God’. It is not clear, however, that this could not equally mean ‘godless’ in the earlier sense as meaning a heretical or immoral person. Sahodharan Ayyappan criticized the religions. To him it was the organized fraud stood in the way of the socio-political reforms.

The exact meaning of ‘atheist’ varies among thinkers, and caution must always be shown to make sure that discussions of atheism are not working at cross purposes. Michael Martin, a leading atheist philosopher, defines atheism entirely in terms of belief. For him, negative atheism is simply the lack of theistic belief, positive atheism is the asserted disbelief in God, and agnosticism is the lack of either belief or disbelief in God. This suggests that negative atheism, the minimal position that all atheists share, divides neatly into agnosticism and positive atheism. It is worth noting that the ‘positive atheist’ need not have certainty that God doesn’t exist: it is a matter of belief, not knowledge”.¹⁸

In the case against God, George Smith has explained “atheism” in the following manner: The prefix ‘a’ means ‘without’, so the term ‘a-theism’ literally means ‘without theism’, or without belief in a God or Gods. Atheism, therefore, is the absence of theistic belief. One who does not believe in the existence of a God or supernatural being is properly designated as an atheist. Smith grants that “atheism” is sometimes defined as “the belief that there is no God of any kind”, or the claim that a God cannot exist. However, according to him, while these are categories of atheism, they do not exhaust the meaning of atheism and they are somewhat misleading with respect to the basic nature of atheism. As he says:

Atheism, in its basic form, is not a belief; it is the absence of belief. An atheist is not primarily a person who believes that a God does not exist; rather he does not believe in the existence of a God. Thus, according to Smith, “theism” and “atheism” are descriptive terms: they specify the presence or absence of a belief in God. “If a person is designated as a theist, this tells us that he believes in a God, not why he believes. If a person is designated as an atheist, this tells us that he does not believe in a God, not why he does not believe.”¹⁹

In the medieval period, Christianity and Islam had tryst with atheist philosophy, both in shape i.e. for and against. In every sense, role of religion in the so called medieval era is very debatable. History witnessed its power-factor as a social changing machine in social order. In ‘Christian Europe’, people were persecuted for heresy, especially in countries where the Inquisition was active. Thomas Aquinas’ five proofs for God’s existence, and Anselm’s ontological argument at least acknowledged the validity of the question about god’s existence. The charge of atheism was used as a way of attacking one’s political or religious enemies. Christian atheism is a belief system in which the God of Christianity is rejected but the teachings of Jesus are followed. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, published a book called *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, which removed the references to claims of divinity. The whole idea of Christian atheism was created out of the attempts of theologians to reconcile Christianity with our increasingly secular culture. It closely associated with Renaissance era of Europe; Christian atheists wanted to club Christianity with modern culture.

Secularism paved way for a new thought in religious epistemology. Pope Boniface VIII, because he insisted on the political supremacy of the Church, was accused by his enemies after his death of holding (unlikely) atheistic positions such as “neither believing in the immortality nor incorruptibility of the soul, nor in a life to come”.²⁰ Michel Onfray deals with ‘Christian atheism’ that is, “Chapels of free thinking and rationalist unions are just as bent on conversion as the clergy, while Masonic lodges modelled on those of France’s Third

Republic barely merit attention... To draw the outlines of post-Christian atheism, let us stop for a moment at this obstacle we still have to cross: atheist Christianity or Christianity without God. Yet another curious creature! The phenomenon exists: it characterizes one who denies God but at the same time asserts the excellence of Christian values and the incomparable virtue of evangelical morality”.²¹ Christian atheists reject the current state of the Christian message and wanted to make Christianity more meaningful to people in the modern world. Colin Lyas, a Philosophy lecturer at Lancaster University, stated that “Christian atheists are united also in the belief that any satisfactory answer to these problems must be an answer that will make life tolerable in this world, here and now and which will direct attention to the social and other problems of this life”.²²

Sahodharan Ayyappan was of the opinion that man was in need of Dharma (righteousness) and not religion.²³ The two had some distinctive features. Religion had its origin in the nature of man. Man sought some refuge external to himself out of his helplessness and imperfection. The way of religion was to seek protection by depending on an imaginary force that is called *paramatma* (Universal soul) or *Brahman* (absolute) or God which is conceived as the caused and the motivating force. It is not the way of Dharma. The origin of Dharma lay in the confidence in man’s own power. Its emphasis is on the law of Karma. One’s own way of life is responsible for one’s happiness and affliction. It insisted that man should have an awareness of his own dealings in the form of thought, word and action. Man himself is his saviour. There is no question of submission to any external force.²⁴

Religion had its foundation on faith and tradition and not reason. As such, in a sense all religions could be construed as blind beliefs. Each religion took its own commandments as authority and of others as contradictory. But the code of Dharma did not conflict with any religion. Religions maintained that religious texts were revelations of God and religious

teachers were either the incarnations of God or the messengers of God. Therefore the scriptures and saints were authoritative. This was not the way of the teachers of Dharma or Dharmasastras. Dharmasastras were human creations and its teachers were human beings. So they need not have been believed as final authorities. The way of Dharma was not revealed by God but was discovered by man. It gave man the freedom of inquiry and did not put any obstacles to the progress of knowledge.²⁵

While religions gave prominence to rituals, the way of Dharma gave prominence to action. To make life happy it urged on right thought, right word and right action. Such a tenor of life has to be achieved by continuous practice. As the way of Dharma is action-based it is a very difficult task to follow it. It is a tedious exercise to pursue that razor-sharp path. Only a few could do it. That was the reason for its degeneration into the way of religion. The case of Buddhism is a best example for it.

Not until the mind acquired the will-power by the intellect man suffered from a thirst for religion. Religious faith and devotion and the rituals like adoration, singing devotional songs etc. can evoke a kind of hallucinatory bliss. But *Dharma marga* is not any creed of reliance in a state of man's helplessness. It is a path to be found out by means of self-reliance and independence. It should not be degraded into religion. People have to be elevated to that stage.

The world could have attained the stage of international cooperation and universal peace through the *Dharma marga*. It need not be in the name of Buddhism. In whatsoever name, to establish the values of human greatness and human freedom the *dharma marga* has to be spread the world over.

Thus he elaborated upon the distinctions of Dharma from religion to stress the need of pursuing the rational way of dharma instead of the irrational way of religion to make life happy. To the extent religion is a degenerating force in worldly life Sahodharan Ayyappan

denounced it. The good aspects of it had not been attacked. It was not religion or God that helped man to better his life in this world but his own action. Man is the maker of his own destiny. Therefore reason alone should be the guiding force of his action. Reason based values are the primary requirements for a good life. *Dharma marga* incorporated such values. He actually wanted to create an intellectual awakening and moral regeneration among the people by destroying their predilection for relying upon scriptures and traditions. Without such an awakening the society could not have been reformed. He was preparing the ground work for it.

During the Renaissance and the Reformation, criticism of the religious establishment started to become more frequent, but did not amount to actual atheism; we can say that it was also agnosticism or skepticism. The concept of atheism re-emerged initially as a reaction to the intellectual and religious turmoil of the age of Enlightenment and the Reformation. The term *atheism* itself was coined in France in the sixteenth century.²⁶

Paul Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) was a Parisian social figure, in his work '*The System of Nature*'²⁷ in 1770 he proclaimed open denial (may be first in modern history) of the existence of god avowal of atheism. Since classical times, it may be the first direct atheistic approach on as public debate. D'Holbach conducted a famous salon widely attended by many intellectual notables of the day, including Denis Diderot, Jean Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, Adam Smith, and Benjamin Franklin. The pamphlet *Answer to Dr Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1782) is considered to be the first published declaration of atheism in Britian. This was the beginning stage of atheist thought in modern period.

The French Revolution of 1789 catapulted atheistic thought into political notability, and opened the way for the nineteenth century movements of Rationalism, Free thought, and Liberalism. Born in 1792, romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, a child of the age of Enlightenment, was expelled from the Oxford University in 1811 for submitting to the Dean

an anonymous pamphlet that he wrote titled *The Necessity of Atheism*. This pamphlet is considered by scholars as the first atheistic ideas published in the English language. The 19th century was significant time of rationalism and atheism because this era gives theoretical basis for these thoughts in its all heights. Atheism in the twentieth century found recognition in a wide variety of other, broader philosophies, such as existentialism, objectivism, secular humanism, nihilism, logical positivism, Marxism, feminism,²⁸ and the general scientific and rationalist movement. Neo-positivism and analytical philosophy discarded classical rationalism and metaphysics in favour of strict empiricism and epistemological nominalism. By the time of twentieth century the atheist spectrum became more vibrant than earlier centuries.

The rationalist tradition in India is closely related to various materialist philosophies. It will become more obvious if a comparison made with the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Vedas establish the divine power by way of institutionalism. Priesthood played a key role in it. The charming of the Vedic hymns creates some sort of a deep submission in the people and thereby makes them conform to the Vedic beliefs. But the Upanishads conduct a quest for truth. The questions raised by the disciples to the Prajapati, the chief practitioner, are many. This makes reasoning power. Upanishadic thoughts and the Sankhya-Nyaya-Vaisheshika philosophies reflect the inquiry method of human life. Although these texts deal with metaphysics, it is not mentioned in the sense that the world is commonly understood in the priestly and spiritual senses. In later, Buddhism come forward to mass influence with ahimsa (non-violence), the Vedic priestly order tried to obstruct it with the help of power of the Kingship. The *Bhagavat Gita* depicts the clashes over the dialogic system of Indian Upanishad tradition.

Another root of Indian tradition of atheist movement lies in ancient school of Indian philosophy that is popularly known as Charvaka philosophy or Lokayata, which is classified

as a “heterodox” (nastika) system, the same classification being given to Buddhism and Jainism. It is characterized as a materialistic and atheistic school of thought. While this branch of Indian philosophy is not considered as part of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, it is noteworthy as evidence of a materialistic movement within Hinduism. It assumes various forms of philosophical skepticism and religious indifference. It is named after its founder, Charvaka, author of the *Barhaspatya-Sutras*. Only from about the sixth century the term is restricted to the school of the *Lokayatikas*. The name Charvaka is first used in the seventh century by the philosopher Purandara, who refers to his fellow materialists as “the Charvakas”, and it is used by the eighth century philosophers Kamalasila and Haribhadra. Shankara, on the other hand, always uses *Lokayata*, not Charvaka. The Charvaka School thus appears to have gradually grown out of generic skepticism in the Mauryan period, but its existence as an organized body cannot be ascertained for times predating the sixth century. The *Brahaspatya-Sutras* were likely to be composed in Mauryan times, predating 150 BC, based on a reference in the *Mahabhasya* of Patanjali. Available evidence suggests that Charvaka philosophy was set out in the *Brahaspatya-Sutras*, probably in Mauryan times. Neither this text nor any other original text of the Charvaka School of philosophy has been preserved.²⁹ Its principal works are known only from fragments cited by its Hindu and Buddhist opponents. Charvaka philosophy appears to have died out sometime in the fifteenth century. Madhavacharya, the thirteenth and fourteenth-century Vedantic philosopher from South India, starts his famous work *The Sarva-darsana-sangraha* with a chapter on the Charvaka system with the intention of refuting it.³⁰

The nature and features of Lokayata philosophy are undisputable. But its prevalence and existence seems grossly exaggerated and even goes to the extent of myth making. There are no ancient texts which can be attributed to this school of philosophy. Not a single ruler can be traced in ancient or medieval India who officially proclaimed its political philosophy as Lokayata. E.W. Hopkins assumes that Charvaka philosophy is co-existed with Buddhism,

mentioning “the old Carvaka or materialist of the six century BC”.³¹ Rhys Davids assumes that Lokayata in c.500 BC came to mean “skepticism” in general and not being organized as a philosophical school.³²

According to Satish Chandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, “Though materialism in some form or other has always been present in India, and occasional references are found in the Vedas, in the Buddhist literature, the Epics, as well as in the later philosophical works we do not find any systematic work on materialism, nor any organized school of followers as the other philosophical schools possess. But almost every work of the other schools states, for refutation, the materialistic views. Our knowledge of Indian materialism is chiefly based on these”.³³ At the advent of the Vedic philosophy and the political strength of Vedic-Hinduism over state formation Charvakas lost their existence in society.

In theoretical realm, logical rationalism has its own approach. An explanation goes: “In this section, I wish to explore that *logical* relationship between rationalism and atheism as opposed to the *empirical* relationship. In other words, I am not concerned here with the question whether most of those who call themselves “rationalist” are, in fact, atheists or not and vice versa. I am concerned here with the question whether *atheism follows logically* from rationalism and vice versa. It appears to me that *atheism does follow logically from rationalism*. There are no good reasons for believing in the existence of god. Besides, the idea of god as found in the major religions of the world does not square up with the presence of evil in this world. Thus, I maintain that if a person is a consistent rationalist, he or she is bound to be an atheist as well. However, the converse is not true, because rationalism does not follow logically from atheism. The argument “*god does not exist, therefore, reason alone is a source of knowledge*” or the argument “*I do not believe in the existence of god, therefore, reason alone is a source of knowledge*” is not a valid argument. Thus, it is logically possible

for a person to be an atheist without being a rationalist".³⁴ The space of debate of contemporary atheists is remarkable in their vibrant approaches.

The new atheists claim that their views are mainly based on a scientific perspective. Most philosophers thought that science was indifferent, agnostic or even incapable of dealing with the metaphysical concepts like "God". Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* is special mention here.³⁵ Dawkins on the contrary, in his book argues that "God Hypothesis" is a valid area of genuine scientific application and having effects in the physical universe, and like any other hypothesis can be tested and falsified. But surprisingly, he did not explain how this can be performed. The new atheists are particularly critical about two non-overlapping magisterial (NOMA), the view advocated by Stephen Jay Gould who himself is a proclaimed atheist and Marxist that a "domain where one form of teaching holds the appropriate tools for meaningful discourse and resolution."³⁶ According to Gould's proposal, science and religion should be confined to two different non-overlapping domains: science would be limited to the empirical realm, including theories developed to describe observations, while religion would deal with questions of ultimate meaning and moral value.

Sahodharan Ayyappan as a Rationalist

Although Ayyappan was influenced by the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru in his fight against the caste system, he believed, unlike Guru, that ideas about religion and God were irrelevant to the promotion of egalitarian values. He considered that religions, especially Hinduism, had only spread superstitions and magic which supported the caste system. Thus, in the place of Guru's religious rational thought, Sahodharan Ayyappan developed a secular rationalist ideology. Stemming from his first lesson of rationalism and scientific thought from Rama Varma Thampan, his teacher in Paroor High School, Ayyappan's view had crystallized by about 1927.³⁷ Ayyappan never believed that the Guru had said the last word on any subject, and he never hesitated to speak out his own ideas about things. He wanted reforms in

every field, his numerous articles and speeches would bear ample proof of it. He was an ardent enemy of blind faith, superstitions and arbitrary assumptions including religions and all those which are connected with them. That was why he fought all his life, with spectacular courage, indefatigable vigour for eschewing ignorance, obscurantism and overthrowing all reactionary and obstructive traditional institutions.

During his studies at Calicut he used to attend the speeches of Brahmananda Swami Sivayogi and Vagbhatananda. Vagbhatananda's eloquent speeches on caste and idol worship further widened the mental horizon of Ayyappan.³⁸ According to Sivayogi religion and god are sources of sorrow and suffering and man is enslaved by them. Emancipation is possible only by discarding them. Man has to realize that his friend or enemy is his own mind. Neither God nor the devil is responsible for the actions that spring from the mind which brings good or evil to man.³⁹ Caste and the associated evils like inequality are the creations of the mind. Sivayogi had much admiration for the Buddha and his teachings. Sivayogi was an intellectual of the modern type, who advocated freethinking and rationalism.

Sivayogi felt that people unable to know the reality was running helter-skelter in search of happiness. Some were practicing the sacrificial rites and rituals. Some were wasting time in learning the vedas and sastras without any use to attain happiness. Many were lamenting that they had no right to learning and worshipping. Still others were seeking refuge in temples or holy places or forests. A few were starving to attain salvation, while there were people lamenting that they had no sons to do funeral rites, without which they would not get salvation.⁴⁰ In general, the Hindus were seeking false ways prescribed by the 'Karmakanda', which made life miserable. These ideas of Sivayogi had a tremendous role in the shaping of the rationalist outlook of man.

One of the messages of Sree Narayana Guru was “One caste, one religion and one God for Man”. Ayyappan considered that it required modification and he improved it by saying “No caste, No religion and No God for Man.”⁴¹

Sahodharan Ayyappan’s ideology consisted of three major strands - the secular humanism of Buddhism, the achievements and science of scientific explanation and the Marxist ideology of socialism. The influence of the humanitarian aspects of Buddhism on his philosophy is to be seen in his assertion that ‘Dharma’ was the path of right action that a man is known by his actions, and that action and not birth determines one’s status in society. Equality, compassion, tolerance, love and service to humanity are the path of Dharma.⁴² On the strength of these Buddhist ideas, he rejected idol worship, cruel acts such as animal sacrifices, caste inequalities in the name of God and exploitation of Brahmin priests. In the poem entitled “Buddha margam”, he clearly declared that he was a follower of Buddhism.⁴³ Ayyappan further declared that even though great men and Texts provide guidance, he was not a slave to any of them. According to Sahodharan Ayyappan, it was not necessary to accept any religious label and create another religious group, although it was essential to practice the path of Dharma.⁴⁴

Sahodharan Ayyappan extolled the virtues of science. Science explains the mysteries of the universe, it controls nature and provides positivist explanations based on observation and experimentation. Therefore, it destroys the slavery of man to sacred texts and lifts him above irrational beliefs and deceptive thinking. Science frees the intellect and makes man independent, bringing him enlightenment. He made a scientific out look for his attack on religion. He was also influenced by Marx’s and Lenin’s ideas on socialism, and was against any kind of exploitation of man by man, upholding the cause of poor and the down trodden.

Rationalist movement was the most prominent stream evolved out of the Kerala renaissance. In the 1930's we can see people from many parts of Kerala organizing under a platform, having their movement registered and starting a journal to propagate the atheist and rationalist ideology. We can consider this juncture of rationalist movement which extends up to the 1960's as the first phase of the organized rationalist movement.

Key Role of *Yukthivadi* and the Yukthivadi Sanghams

Although a meeting was convened at the house of C.Krishnan in Kozhikode in 1927 to discuss the publishing of *Yukthivadi* magazine, it was only in 1929 that the magazine was started. In its first edition itself, the magazine presented ideas regarding the theoretical position of the rationalist movement. The argument goes like: 'It's observation and the rationalist thought based on what one observes which buttress knowledge. The belief system based on supernatural knowledge hampered the course of rationalism. The freer and lesser restrained the observation and thought are, the more knowledge will grow. The belief based on our hearing says that knowledge is derived beforehand. This hampers our observation skills. So those who love knowledge should encourage the rationalist movement.'⁴⁵ In the first edition, the need for starting a journal is explained as a historical necessity. It says: 'Except for a few, all newspapers are managed by those who oppose the rationalist movement. There will be hardly any coverage for the movement, or, for that matter, some of them quite openly attacks the movement'.⁴⁶

It clearly declares what rationalism is: It is not a religion. It's a temperament that only knowledge tested by reason should be received. A rationalist tries to implant this temperament among people. For that she/he should discard irrational knowledge and search for only the rational knowledge. She/he dissects the right and wrong and projects only the right. Rationalists have only one constant before them, i.e. knowledge should be rationally compact.

And they are humanists. Rationalism and humanism are two sides of the same coin. They keep up a mutual existence.⁴⁷

The basic vision of the rationalist group in Kerala is explained here. It is clear that the movement adopted a dualistic approach like right/wrong, rational/ irrational, divine/godless, belief/ disbelief and religious/ secular. Rationalists are taking a dualistic and humanistic approach focusing on the irreligious and non-divine concepts. In front cover of *Yukthivadi* frequently quoted a definition that was “Rationalism is, after all, the weighing of evidence by clear thinking and sifting truth from falsehood in all matters amenable to investigation”.⁴⁸

The first edition is notable for the subjects it dealt with. Also important is the list of subjects it wanted to focus. There were secular and rationalistic discourses of Marx, Nordo, Russell, Charles Bradlaugh, Bonner, J.M. Robertson and J.A.Haubson. Eswara Varma Thampan translated E.T.Muller’s article ‘Is religion necessary’ and freely discussed his ‘Belief in God’. There were Sahodharan Ayyappan’s poem ‘Science dasakam’ (Decade of science), M.P. Varkey’s ‘Veda sasthanam’ (an article on the difference between Veda and science), and Kusumam P.P. Antony’s *Nammude chumathala* (our duty-an article on the responsibilities of a rationalist).

In the second edition there are editorial pieces and the M.P.Varkey’s article series ‘*Yukthivadiyude Nila*’ (a rationalists’ stance). The next editions showcase Ingersoll’s quotes, critiques on religion, and responses to the magazines that criticize rationalists. At the time *Sathyadeepam*, the Catholic mouthpiece, had started the religious critiques published in Ayyappan’s *Sahodharan*. These defeats were ideological. Editorial of *Sathyadeepam* makes a scathing attack on rationalists.’ M.P. Varkey has published another article in *Sahodharan*. The author utters that eternal hell is one of the tricks devised by the clergy to threaten people to submission. It might be possible, he added, for the clergy to keep people in their thrall as long as those people are ignorant. But what reason is there for some ‘scholars’ who are

deemed real scientists in the twentieth century to believe in the existence of eternal hell? It is surprising that those scholars hardly make any attempt to release themselves from the tricks of the clergy although they are equipped with intelligence and skills.’ People with ‘extra intelligence’ like *Mr. Author* have long understood these tricks.⁴⁹ This is a very important observation about rationalist stand on science. It shows that religion can use science as same as rationalists. *Yukthivadi* did consider the complaints made by its rivals like Sathyadeepam that Christianity was being criticized the most.⁵⁰ Most rationalists at that time belonged to the Christian tradition. Also visible is the trend that a group of people in Christian areas embraces rationalism. The initial editions of *Yukthivadi* have contributions from writers like M.C. Joseph, Kusumam, P.P. Antony, Lonan Alappat, M.P.Varkey, and E.M. Chery who froze off Christianity and its denominations.⁵¹

In the edition of 1930 Dhanu (December- January), *Yukthivadi* had a picture of M.P.Varkey with the caption: ‘the first Christian in Kerala to have ever opposed ‘christian superstitions’.⁵² In the obit-edit piece published after Lonan Alappat passed away, he was said to ‘have been the Head master in the Catholic grant school in Aranattukara (Thrissur). After he brought out a book *Samshayanivarthi* (Clearing doubts), ‘Maharon’, a Christian denomination blessed him with expulsion. Now jobless, he joined a government school under Kochi government.⁵³ He is considered the first Catholic to have ever been expelled from a denomination for his opinion, here.⁵⁴ The magazine *Samudayasevini* made a complaint that *Yukthivadi* keeps mum on Islam.⁵⁵ The latter explains: ‘*Sevini* says we speak not much of Muhammad’s religion. The main reason is that we have no Muslim writers with us seeing that a critique on religion had better come from a follower of that religion to dispel mistakes , we try to do so to a great extent possible.⁵⁶

Not even a single Muslim penned a piece in *Yukthivadi* in its earlier issues. This fact helps us to think of the rationalization process within Islam. It was by 1950 that reform

movements gathered momentum in Islam. Although in the beginning of twentieth century Vakkom Abdukhader Maulavi made effort in that direction, his reform was not active at the level of a movement. On the criticisms against rationalism in *Deepika* monthly which stated publishing under the Muslim initiative, *Yukthivadi* says: we are happy to see that rationalist movements has attracted the attention of *Deepika* run by our respectable Muslim friends.⁵⁷

When religion became a topic of State, *Yukthivadi* intervened. ‘See, a motion has been moved in Kochi assembly for the compulsory religious education in schools. It is very sad that the motion was ruled out. Rationalists should have tried to have it passed with an amendment. It is not enough that a religion should be taught. It must be compulsory subject for examinations. It’s not because of the religious impartiality that a rationalist opts for that. If something is made compulsory, it will be detested. If some one is compelled to study something; she/he will hate it. Won’t students say why it should not, if religion should not be taught at all? Anarchists and atheists of today have studied in schools, where as those have not gone to schools are believers.’⁵⁸

Friendly meets were quite authoritatively held in 1930’s. The focus of the meets was the propagation of rationalist ideology. The report on the formation of the movement in 1935 reads: On January 13, 1935, a friendly meet of rationalists was held as usual. Around seventy representatives, notably including women, from Talassery to Trivandrum participated in the meet. The purpose of the meet was introducing one to another in the group. After introduction, sharing happy moments, having feast with people cutting across religions and castes, some representatives spoke about the necessity of an organisation to propagate rationalist ideology. In the aftermath, ‘Kerala Yukthivadi Sangham’ earlier KYS was formed with M.Ramavarma Thampan as President, Panambilly Govinda Menon as treasurer and M.C. Joseph as secretary. The movement was formed with an aim to urge people to study religion and other topics independently, scientifically and rationally. Bylaws and memos of the

association were read aloud and passed in the meeting. Men and women at and above eighteen who can agree with the purpose of the movement can join it. They should give 8 *anna* ($\frac{1}{2}$ Rupee) as annual membership fee. Those who desire life-time membership should give Rs 5. Those who want to apply can send their applications to MC Joseph, Irinjalakkuda, Cochin State with annual membership fee.⁵⁹ Although decision was taken to form the movement it took nine months more until 11 November, 1935 to get it registered.

Although the movement suddenly stopped working, friendly meets of rationalists were occasionally held in Kerala. It went on taking decisions and planning activities some of which were actualized, while some were not. Some rationalist groups also existed at that time in many regions. They held meetings and discussions regularly. Members of earlier KYS were rejuvenated by rationalist and reform movements with their appearance.

The year 1935, when rationalist movement came and disappeared all of a sudden, was when political struggles were active in Kerala. Organized movements were held against the decision in Travancore and Kochi of keeping some people aloof from government services on the basis of religion and caste. The right of the coloured to enter temple premises was strongly voiced. The activities after the formation of the rationalist movement in 1935 were the annual conferences and friendly meets. M.C. Joseph, Sahodharan Ayyappan, M. Prabha and Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai led these groupings. The reports of the conferences were published in *Yukthivadi* which was regularly brought out. Kuttippuzha could theorise, and M.C could give practical dimension to, the contemporary rationalism in Kerala.

Writers, who can understand the chemistry of devotion, came to the forefront. Walking on fire-coals (*kanalattam*) was a miracle practiced in places like Engandiyoor in Vadanapilly. K.R. Krishnan writes: Devotees take acts and practices which ordinary people are unable to perform as miracles or divine tests. But they are not surprised at the miracles that those who don't wear the shield of devotion. They take them merely as adventures.⁶⁰ It is

the psychology of belief that is reflected in it. Rationalists at that time proved that *kanalattam* was not a miracle but an ordinary activity which could be performed by dint of medicine and habit. This paved the way for examining what form of struggle, or whether the struggle itself, is possible.

Catholic newspapers like *Sathyadeepam*, *Sathyanadam* and *Malabar Mail* came out in the open against the question in the Malayalam question paper for the Travancore school final in 1940. Read some sentences in the question paper: Atheism is far better than the foolish belief in god. Rather, foolish belief is more dangerous than atheism. Discretion, scientific knowledge, loves for human beings and public opinion can lead a non-believing atheist on the path of ethics and morality.⁶¹ *Sathyadeepam* writes: We remind the government and educational department that they have responsibility to fail this questioner by giving him good marks, thereby steering him away from this kind of poisonous initiatives.⁶²

Yukthivadi writes as a criticism: ‘We have not yet known anybody bewildered by this question but the Catholics who consider religious trade as a profitable industry.’⁶³ Read a religious news report which expresses concern about the spread of atheism among the Catholics: ‘When a professor asked 50 graduates in London what their religion was, they answered it was Christianity. But when he asked how many of them believed in Christ as God, only twelve of them answered in the affirmative and only seven said they had ever gone to a Church. It is condemnable that atheism is spreading among the Christians.’⁶⁴ Rationalist fraternities of the time unleashed scathing attack against religion and superstition. In its annual conference in 1936, the scientific lecture delivered by Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai was about the evolutionary theory. In 1937 and 1939 annual meets were held under the chair of K. Ayyappan in Aluva and Kochi respectively.

The report on the conference in 1939 says: It is a great advantage that the upper caste Hindus including Brahmins and various low-caste Hindus and believers including Christians

and Muslims come together, irrespective of caste and religion, and eat together. One evidence for the growth of the rationalist movement in Kerala is that, even if not personally invited, many gentlemen from Kozhikode to Trivandrum, after noticing the news about the conference in newspapers and ads, participated in the meet and helped us financially and physically.⁶⁵ *Sahodharan* magazine testifies to the popularity of the rationalist movement which stood by the Sahodhara Sangham. Sahodharan adopted a friendly attitude to the reformatory aspects of the religion. Inspired by these friendly meets Malayalis in Srilanka organized similar meets there. The letters there of were read in the conference.

Ayyappan strongly attacked the orthodox Hindu beliefs and practices which stemmed from his opposition to personalized gods, temples, pilgrimages and rituals. Tending towards agnosticism rather than atheism, he told his followers not to search for god in temples but in their own hearts, and to express their devotion to Him not by sacrificing animals, fasting or pilgrimage, but by service, love and compassion. Thus was the path of Dharma which did not require God for its operation.⁶⁶ Ayyappan attacked what he called the 'magic' of the priests. According to him darkness gave birth to fear, and fear to a number of Gods and to a belief in a magical relationship between man and God. Priests were trained in such magic and played tricks with man in relation to God. Rational men should not fall prey to the magic of priests, but should overcome fear and magic by scientific explanation.⁶⁷

To bring these views to the public and win their support, Sahodharan Ayyappan initiated a programme of action to stop devotees from sacrificing cocks at the Bharani festival at Cranganore and from undertaking pilgrimages to the Palani Hills, Sabarimala and other places. A temple devoted to the worship of the goddess Bhagavati exists at Kodungallur in Kerala. Every year in the month of March-April (Meenam), a festival is organized to worship the deity on the day when the star Bharani appears. Hence the festival is called Bharani. It had become famous for the three things cock sacrifice, the excessive consumption of alcohol

and the singing of obscene songs, all of which attracted a large number of pilgrims, including Ezhavas. Sahodharan Ayyappan and his followers went to Kodungallur to exhort the pilgrims not to go to Bharani. He composed a poem entitled “Don’t go to Bharani” which soon became popular. In it, he said that animal sacrifice was cruel, foolish and sinful, that liquor was poison and that the singing of obscene songs was uncivilized.⁶⁸ There was much opposition to his picketing of Barani pilgrims. Enthusiastic pilgrims poured cashew oil over Ayyappan and his followers, threw red ants’ nests at them and threatened to kill them. Some of the pilgrims even mishandled Sahodharan Ayyappan and his followers and inflicted injuries on their body. However, the arrival of police saved the group from the crisis.⁶⁹ In the face of all these challenges and threats, he carried on with his propaganda.

A.K.Kunhi Moideen, Member from Kodungallur constituency, introduced a resolution in the Cochin Legislative Council recommending the Government for prohibiting the singing of obscene songs in the public roads. He tried to explain the difficulties experienced by the people of the locality during Bharani festival. Educated and civilized women of the area were confined to their houses. The Girls High School near Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple had to close down for about two weeks. The majority of the people in Kodungallur hate those obscene songs.⁷⁰ Sahodharan Ayyappan explained before the House of his experience and the drunken stage of many pilgrims which reduced them to the status of animals.⁷¹ So, he urged the Council to pass that resolution and recommend the Government to prohibit the singing of obscene songs in the public roads. After discussion, the resolution was put to votes and passed. Finally, Herbert, the Diwan of Cochin, prohibited the singing of obscene songs at the Bharani festival in Cranganore.⁷²

Sahodharan Ayyappan tried to enlighten the people by making scathing attacks on Hinduism and allied superstitions. He appealed the people of Cranganore to abstain from their traditional participation in the festival at Kavu (sacred groves).⁷³ He pointed out that even though dogs and cats can freely walk in the public roads, the person belonging to

backward communities could not do so. The higher castes justified it on the ground of the level of sins made in the previous birth. The appeal of Sahodharan Ayyappan had the desired effect and the Ezhavas desisted from their traditional 'Talappoli'.⁷⁴

P. Kumaran Ezhuthassan, member from Mulakunnathukavu constituency, introduced a resolution in the Cochin Legislative Council demanded the Government that '*Thye puyam*' be made a public holiday in the State.⁷⁵ This day is sacred to Subramonia. Special offerings are made in this day (Puyam day of Makaram) in the Subramonia temples. An important rite associated with the '*Thye puyam*' celebrations are that devotees carry *kavadi* on their shoulders and trek their way to Subramonia temples to offer *abhishekams*. Sahodharan Ayyappan opposed this resolution and said that the *kavadi thullal* need not be encouraged.⁷⁶ Finally, the resolution was withdrawn with leave of the House.

Sahodharan Ayyappan advised the followers of Sree Narayana Guru that they should shed the concept of Sree Narayana Guru as a God.⁷⁷ He further clarified that the supreme knowledge of Sree Narayana Guru was acquired through observation and analysis and not by any divine power. He suggested that only a casteless society in India can promote the unity of the county. According to him, Indians were born in caste, grows with caste and dies in caste. This was the major obstacle for the unity of the people. He concluded that the new idea of one caste for mankind as enunciated by Sree Narayana Guru is the panacea for all the social problems of the country.⁷⁸

Sahodharan Ayyappan made an inaugural speech on the All Religious Meet held at Aluva which aimed at the promotion of understanding between different religions.⁷⁹ He opined that even after the rapid progress of science, there are areas which are left unknown to scientists. Those unknown areas were utilized by religions for the spread of their beliefs. However, those religions provide relief and sanctuary to the needy. Hence, people refuse to desert religion. So, Sree Narayana Guru advised the people to destroy caste and make

religion a personal affair.⁸⁰ Sahodharan Ayyappan cited Mahatma Gandhi as an example of good man and Godse as a wicked man, both of them had strong religious convictions.⁸¹

Addressing the Sivagiri pilgrims, Sahodharan Ayyappan reiterated the point that they should not organize any religion. All religions should be the personal affairs of individuals. The followers of Sree Narayana Guru would work for the merger of all religions into one.⁸² When the caste ceased to exist and the religion becomes the personal affair, then all the communities would merge together and becomes one. Then only the divisions and inequalities disappear⁸³

In this speech at Thiruvananthapuram Manacaud Thottam Mahasamadhi Smaraka Granthasala anniversary, Sahodharan Ayyappan referred about the conversion of Ezhavas and Nadars of Neyyattinkara to Christianity. He said that even after the conversion, the Ezhavas used to go to Aruvippuram temple and continue their caste identities. However, he congratulated those communities which follow a liberal attitude towards the converts and cautioned against the intervention of Hindu fundamentalists.⁸⁴ He also responded to the reference of him as an atheist in the welcome speech and said that he had neither any positive nor negative reply⁸⁵

Sahodharan Ayyappan reminded the Sivagiri pilgrims that unlike the other pilgrimages, they had a noble mission. Their mission was to study the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru at close quarters, copy them in their daily life and to practice it. He also cautioned them against degeneration of the pilgrimage by institutionalization and commercialization.⁸⁶ He continued the speech by highlighting the noble and simple life of Sree Narayana Guru, and his life long ambition of making men good and free to think. He explained the various religious experiments of Sree Narayana Guru in different periods. Sree Narayana Guru first of all, installed the Sivalinga at Aruvippuram. Second installation was of Saraswathi at Varkala. Third one was of the installation of words like Truth etc at

Murukkumpuzha. Fourth installation was of a mirror at Kalavancode and lastly at Aluva where there was nothing as an installation. Those different stages were the progressive steps for the worshippers and had great implications about the existence of God. Sahodharan Ayyappan tried to disseminate those ideas in the minds of the Sivagiri pilgrims.

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