

LIFE WRITING: MONOGRAPH SERIES
SERIES EDITOR: G.S. JAYASREE

**SCRIPTING LIVES:
A STUDY OF PETITIONS
IN BRITISH COLONIAL
TRAVANCORE**

Meera M. Bhagavathy

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Institute of English
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**Scripting Lives:
A Study of Petitions in British
Colonial Travancore**

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The monograph *Scripting Lives: A Study of Petitions in British Colonial Travancore* is a selective study of individual petitions submitted to the British Colonial Government as life narratives. The genre of petition is perceived as a life narrative through the concept of cultural memory which makes it possible to read cultured memories or memory cultures as life texts. The individual petitioners, who created the narratives of the everyday, told stories starkly different from those who occupied the centre stage of progress, development, rebellions, mass movements, political debate and social reformation in Travancore. It is too shallow to see them as responses to the colonial regime alone; as significant as they are as polite retorts to a forced rule, they are momentous presences, lives lived, and were voices of the registered absentees of colonial history. In the most passionate and deferent testimonies, these men and women, sought justice and grace from the State, in order to ensure their well-being and those dependant on them. The study argues that petitions best apprehend the refractions of a social change which seldom acquire visibility in cultural documentation. It also argues that the petitionary discourse, opens up a realm of narrative immediacy, which demands a complex understanding of the colonial experience. It also problematizes the conventional contexts of understanding a life narrative and challenges the notion of a complete life in favour of a more inclusive paradigm of the 'sketch' or the 'fragmental'.

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Through the prism of life...

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“**O**nce upon a time, there was very powerful man called *Diwanji*. He ruled a very large kingdom with hundreds of men serving him. People of his kingdom had a custom of writing letters to him seeking help and solutions to their problems and miseries in their life. One day he received a letter from *Leelamma*, a farmer’s wife. Her life was sinking...”

Thus began a series of fascinating bed time stories that I have been hearing since I was eight. My grandfather would tell me abidingly, every night of the summer holidays, a story of a man or a woman, trapped in one of the many webs of life and in need of immediate help. The letters were passionate, polite and begged profoundly to the *Diwanji*. *Diwanji* in turn, sent his men to investigate the case and after seeking their reports pronounced a judgement on the case. Grandpa put a spell on me with these stories as I waited, biting my nails to hear the judgement on them.

Seven years later I found out that my Grandfather, Krishnaswamy Iyer was a *Shirestedar* (the clerk who is the immediate assistant to the Judge) at the District Session’s Court, Kottayam in the current state of Kerala from 1929 to 1955. One year later, my history books promptly make, much to my dismay, the discovery that those letters were indeed petitions which were

submitted to the princely State of Travancore under the British rule. My tenth-grade history lessons had wrecked the beautiful dramatic world of Diwanji, Leelamma and many such characters. Now they were the obvious, ubiquitous and quite the ordinary petitioners who wrote to the government headed by the Diwan. However, two things struck a chord in me: first, my Grandfather could dramatize his daily office work and the everyday of men and women then, as tales from a different world, and second, I could, as a child's mind would allow, treat it as stories of people and characters in the comic books and tales I read during the time, feeling a deep sense of empathy towards them.

As much as I could not reconcile the damage history had done to my imagination, I could also not get past how remarkably history had turned what seemed to me the most intriguing, exotic and unfamiliar into something that was most commonplace and familiar. The difference was in the treatment meted out to these texts by two different mindsets. My bed-time stories promised me a different world and a tale which belonged to these petitions and life in colonial Travancore. I began treating them as life narratives and they began telling me an interesting story of the colony.

My study envisions the petitions which were submitted to the British colonial Travancore, as Life Writing. However, my aim is not to forcibly find a space for petitions in the ever-expanding catalogue of life narratives, but instead, to see how we can problematize the existing equations of the discipline from the paradigm of the petition.

Autobiographies are written by people who think they have led significant lives; if they are accepted as such and appreciated as well written, they form part of the canon. A number of life writings by the hitherto marginalised have also been canonised as representative of writings about communities or at least as representative of them. However, we can accept that all lives are significant to those who live them as exemplified by "Status" messages on social media, blogs including those about daily occurrences, and cyber broadcasts. Each human being is now a writer with lives that are supposedly interesting enough to be brought to the attention of the world at every waking

moment. What did ordinary colonial subjects, much before the IT revolution, do to document their lives, to present them to the public at large? How did they find self-expression or representation? In my view, one of the means available to them was the petition. The humble petition enabled colonial subjects to give expression and coherence, to narrativize their lives up to the moment, the cause of their petition.

To consider petitions from distinguished characters in history like a freedom fighter or a strong political leader would be to fall into the trap of a hegemonic narrative and moreover such petitions have been analyzed well for historical data already. What seemed more poignant to me was the mundane nature of the stories of men and women in my grandfather's narrative. There was nothing out of the ordinary in any of their issues; those were issues that one could expect in the everyday life of a person living in that particular time and culture. What seemed to be mundane two centuries back would no longer be the same when one studies it now. This is precisely the significance of their commonplace character.

Historians have ably dealt with the everyday of life in the cultural pasts of Travancore. However, petitions attribute to this everyday a voice and a tone which can be hardly heard in the eventful traffic of history. They trap many fleeting moments of the everyday, of lives lived and also fashioned which are otherwise less observed in history. Petitions in the colonial archive unfolded to me a strange world and a new narrative, where files spoke and people listened. The dusty piles of paperwork gradually revealed an animated sense of life; though formulaic in tone, they had a distinct character.

My analysis of petitions also suggests how identity and authenticity seem to be a colonial fetish which we unconsciously imbibed unto ourselves and because of which it seems impossible to think outside of it. The study problematizes the common consensus of understanding a life narrative which is mostly dominated by Western critical thought and in due course explores the possibilities of arriving at theories which could adequately explain life narratives that belong to a particular culture, time and space, and not homogenize them under universal theories.

Petitions are, as one would commonly understand, demands for a favour, or for the redressing of an injustice, directed to some established authority. “As the distribution of justice and largesse are important parts of ruling, rulers can hardly deny their subjects the right to approach them to implore them to exercise justice, or to grant a favour”(Voss 1) In the colloquial sense, a petition is a document addressed to some official and signed by numerous individuals. A petition may be oral rather than written, and in this era may be transmitted via the internet. Petition can also be the title of a legal pleading that initiates a legal case.

Petitions as such do not install any legal effect. They represent a moral force which may bring to effect legally the ‘petitioned’ suggestions or requests. Petitions are rather, a polite protest against any displeasing or oppressive system.

No written records survive as to when precisely ‘petitioning’ was invented. Etymologically, the genesis of petitions was fraught with religious connotations. It began in the early fourteenth century as “a supplication or prayer, especially to a deity, from Old French *petition* meaning ‘a request’. The history of petitioning as dispersed in the different political geographies of the world, is best summed by Lex Heerma van Voss, in the introduction to “Petitions in Social History”, in the *International Review of Social History*:

from Egyptian building workers in pharaonic times to illiterate Ecuador Indians in 1899; from anti-Catholic English women in 1642 to French workers asking for the repeal of the *livret d’ouvrier* in 1847; from Italian peasants complaining about noble banditry in 1605 to Brazilian slaves vindicating their rights against their owners in 1823; from western European early modern guild members to German Democratic Republic workers demanding improvement of economic efficiency, or voicing consumer demands.(1-2)

Voss observes the ubiquitous presence of petitions in world history which were part of cultures as diverse as one could vision and rejects the idea of petitions being a colonial

incentive. Therefore, he chooses to keep the word ‘petitions’ as a generic reference denoting all practices of petitions that preceded colonialism and thereafter (2), a premise which the study solemnly shares.

The time period of study roughly covers two centuries—from mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century, till the formation of the State Kerala in the year 1950. The year 1950 marks the culmination of two political struggles that the people of Travancore underwent—the larger, national struggle for independence and the internal movements to achieve a linguistically united geography of Kerala. In the colonial era, individual and collective petitions were in vogue at the same time though their purposes changed over time. Topics varied from extremely political to extremely personal ones. (CF 1763-1901, J 1915-1955, C.S 1926-1949)

I chose Travancore primarily because it was designated as an autonomous princely state, unlike Malabar and Cochin which were directly under British dominion. Petitions which were submitted to the government of Travancore were addressed to the *Diwan*/Minister of the State but the British Resident had supervision over it. It would be interesting to see the internal politics of how the right to petition and the culture of petitioning unfolded in these circumstances. Secondly, I believe it would give some interesting insights into my own cultural memory and perhaps redefine it.

It is imperative to point out the major distinction between the contemporary structure of a petition and the customs of petitioning in the colonial past. As opposed to today’s petition which is often reduced to the phrase-speech layout 1, the colonial petitions were elaborate, sometimes running four to five pages, with religious descriptions of themselves and the crisis at hand. Each suit petitioned a different story; they revealed thematic cartographies of life.

The colonial archive is my primary source. A close reading of the petitions is attempted. Each petition telescopes into the life of the petitioner and into his act of writing a petition. Some

of the documents in the archives were found to be brittle and parts of the file torn away into scraps. Since most of the early nineteenth century documents were manuscripts, some words were difficult to decipher. Both these cases are represented with ellipses in the transcripts of the documents. The spellings which were seen originally in the documents (however misspelt they were) are retained in the transcripts.

Seven case studies form part of the study; two of them comprise more than one petition interlinked crucially to the respective cases in question. The selection of petitions is quite random and arbitrary and is fully acknowledged here. The archives in no manner provide a systematic category of petitions, but it is up to the researcher to group them into different classes and categories. As it was extremely difficult to extract petitions of the same nature which would total to a considerable sum to pursue a localized study based on them, I chose to study samples of petitions, each of which would provide an interesting angle to the questions that I propose to investigate. It does not deliver a comprehensive view on the subject, but it unmistakably maps a distinct field of enquiry that begs profound questions for future research.

Scholars have approached petitions chiefly from the two perspectives – 1) the socio-historical (Andreas Wurgler, Cecilia Nubola, Marcia Schmidt Blaine, Gilbert Shapiro & John Markoff, Ken Lunn & Ann Day, Carola Lipp & Lothar Krempel, Oleg G. Bukhovets, Potukuchi Swarnalatha, Rebecca Nedustop & Liang Hong-Ming) and 2) ideological (Gregory A. Mark, Gwilym Dodd and Majid Siddiqi)². The rhetoric of petitioning seems to be a common interest to all the authors mentioned above. Apart from these scholars, a few other works are commendable for the intellectual rigour and divergent aesthetics of critique.

Udaya Kumar's study "Petitions as Historiography: Dr. Palpu and Kerala's Pasts" documents the formation of the Ezhava Memorial, a mass memorandum submitted to the government for admitting the educated amongst the Ezhava community to the public service. Palpu engaged in a laborious dialogue with the authorities registering his opinions on history, mythology,

and epic which reflected his unique aesthetics of social thought. Since the views and contemplations of one man predominates the entire petitionary discourse, to me, these documents seem to share the political space of life narratives too. Kumar's paper opened up the initial framework of perceiving petitions as life-writing, but in theory, my work tries to challenge the notion of a complete life which amounts to a considerable length as the obvious marker of a life narrative.

Another exceptional scholarship in the area is *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* by Bhavani Raman. She tracks down in graphic detail, the scribal habitus of the region of Madras (the Madras Presidency to be precise) and analyses the implications of such a textual habitus towards the colonial rule and the formation of a bureaucratic technology of power. One of her chapters titled "Addressing the Raj" studies the petitions which were submitted to the colonial government as early as the eighteenth century and discusses how people approached the government and how the government in turn received these narratives. Her arguments formed the backbone of my understanding of the colonial bureaucratic narratives of the time, for Travancore was obliged to the Madras Presidency from where the rulers received rules and regulations.

Natalie Zemon Davis's *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* published as early as 1987 explores the mercy petitions written to the French King in the sixteenth century by the convicts both men and women. Their petitions narrated their stories of crime knitted well within another tale of pardon which was popular in those times in order to convince the King and let them free. The book opened up for me debates of formulaic narratives born out of highly specific contexts of cultural logic and value systems. Her idea of 'fiction in the archives' (4) suggests that the locus of fiction, is not limited to the literature proper, but can be found even in the warehouses of clinical data such as the State or the National archives.

All the three authors mentioned above provided me with models and methods of using archival material in research.

Research on petitions hitherto, irrespective of the angle they are looked into, argue vehemently on their role in the emergence of a public sphere as a consequence of being employed as a tool of organized resistance in times of political crisis. Indeed, petitions were an inherent aspect of the formation of the nation state and nationalism as much as that of democracy, citizen rights and the the politics of mass representation eventually leading towards the electoral politics (Zaret 3). This argument is true but particular to the collective petitioning prevalent in the later years of the colonial rule. Conversely, I am interested in the individual petitions which punctuated the politics of everyday; those handfuls of people who still persisted petitioning even when systems of mass representations had taken over the public space and voice. They form the marginal narratives in the history of 'public opinion'.

I try to look into those people, whose everyday crises could not be represented collectively, and resorted to the form of a disciplined dissent available to them in order to seek redress of their grievances. For this purpose, they had to articulate their lives in detail, legitimize their grievance and narrate it befitting the deferred rhetoric of the genre of petition. The individual petitioners, who created narratives of the everyday had in all aspects a different approach and articulated an alternate regime of truth as will be demonstrated in this study. I would not like to see them as responses to the colonial regime alone; as significant as they are as polite retorts to a forced rule, they are significant presences, lives lived, written to words and voices which were the registered absentees of colonial history. In visualizing them as life writing, the thesis offers a new approach towards reading petition literature.

I have limited the canvas of interpreting Life narratives to the concept of Cultural Memory. Such an understanding is fundamental to comprehend specifically cultured lives carrying specifically cultured memories.

Critical debates most often place textualities at crossroads beckoning the anticipatory epistemological turn. Life writing has been a much-contested term within the four schools of thought³.

The paradigm of memory was a recent addition which opened a fresh channel of ideas. The present study borrows the framework of Memory Studies and tries to place petitions in the nexus of Cultural Memory, Literature and Life Writing. Any act of writing, be it subjective, objective, historical, critical or personal, precludes the act of memorizing; the ‘operative metaphor’⁴ here is that of remembering. If auto/biography is a mode of reading as Paul de Man argues (Man 53), or that of criticism as autobiography as Oscar Wilde writes in the preface to the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (5), it could very well be a mode of remembering as well. Culture⁵ is one among the many agencies of memory, ubiquitous and extremely crucial. The connection between culture and memory is a paradox, one of mutual migration and conceptual overlapping (Eryll 7). This understanding gave rise to the concept of “cultural memory” which is a ceaseless interplay of different levels of memory (social, individual, medial, material) and different mediations of culture (social, political, individual, historical) (Eryll 12).

The cultural memory approach is a great supplement to reading life narratives, which was tossed between the anti-foundational and foundational theoretical approaches⁶ in the late twentieth century. “One advantage of the concept of cultural memory”, writes Max Saunders in his essay, “Life Writing, Cultural Memory and Literary Studies”, “is its ability to hedge its bets on this contest, since it is concerned not with actual events but their cultural repercussions; not with actual memories but with memories as representations, and with representations of memories” (328).

Petitions are *liex de memoire*⁷ which have been the victims of social forgetting and sometimes of social neglect. They become a “modi-memorandi”⁸. Similarly, certain cultures initiate certain styles of remembering by forced or routine repression. For instance, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson talk about how the Germans were schooled “literally and figuratively” to remember their Aryan past as jubilant and glorious, and again after the war, schooled to remember competing versions of the holocaust depending on whether they lived in the “socialist East or the

liberal-democratic West” (Smith and Watson 19) Petitions as a medium, as a genre, and as a culture needs to be investigated in order to understand the textualities that partake in it.

Thus, the paramount question I address here is, how do the colonial policy and the genre of petition culture the memory of people belonging to that era? As a result, what are the means that they can afford and resort to in representing themselves and their lives. How did they remember themselves and their episteme? Finally, what are the implications of such a scripting of life on the larger canvas of Life writing as a discipline? Petitioners do not necessarily form the ordinary or common citizens, nor is it necessary that they represent all walks of life. This selective approach is acknowledged here. Nevertheless, it has the potential to expose either the limits of conceptualizing Life-writing or enhance our understanding about the co-ordinates that define it. It reflects the politics of the archives as well.

Life writing is one form which perpetually contests generic distinctions. The present study is certainly an attempt to push the boundaries of the genre but does not invalidate the concept of the genre. The pivotal point here is the inter-webs of Life-writing, culture and memory which seamlessly seep into each other and play at myriad levels⁹. Such a perspective enables one to read cultured memories/ memory cultures as life texts¹⁰.

I have not limited my analysis to just the text of the petition but incorporated how these petitions were received by the government too. This includes both official statements and correspondences between officials in the service and also their remarks which are sometimes scribbled in the petitions. I therefore, deviate from the understanding of petition as a dialogue between the petitioner and the government; it would be interesting to them as both a synchronic and diachronic dialogue between the petitioner and the government, and those within the bureaucratic order. The files no longer remain sedated, solitary and displaced from their environment, but acquire an animated history that promise to tell an interesting story of the colony, its precarious etiquettes of writing and of the lives that were made out of it.

In Search of a Petitionary Past: Travancore and the Historical Context of Petitioning

One of the most significant aspects of understanding the culturing of memories is to understand the historicity of cultural contexts that initiated modes of remembering. Therefore, it is imperative to provide the socio-political and cultural contexts that catapulted the form of the colonial petition into a practice. The colonial petition was not cultured in a vacuum; it was certainly a product of colonial modernity but not necessarily a colonial pure breed. Rather, it seems to be a palimpsest of native administrative/ technological currencies, very much imbibing the continuity in essence. The modernity attributed to the colonial petition is not because it was written, i.e., a written form of communication (as opposed to the more dominant medium of oral communication prevalent before colonial contact), but because of the change in disposition to writing. It is worthwhile to take a look at the systems that preceded the colonial petition, which also ironically, fostered it.

In 1766, when Hyder Ali cracked down the Zamorin house and other northern chieftains irrevocably Travancore alone withstood the massacre, holding high on its own in the South. Marthanda Varma was the illustrious ruler of Travancore during this period. He upon assuming power put an end to the feudalism of the Nairs and the most powerful faction of elites (the *Ettuveetil Pillamar*/ Lords of the Eight Houses) who kept monarchy perennially impotent. Later, Tipu Sultan's bloody crusades in 1798 sent shudders through its body politic. However, Marthanda Varma's *Nairppada*, the Nair brigade was able to defeat the Mysore army in a strategic alliance with the British East India Company. This victory, flanked on one side with the tactical foreign alliance and on the other by an intense personal and political imperative to secure the dynastic legacy, forged a powerful yet tumultuous ground for a continued foreign presence in the land and its time, that which neither Travancore nor India had ever seen or anticipated before¹. Thus began a tale of uneasy friendship, a government of parley and a "new people" (Pillai, 18) who found themselves incompletely translated neither into the

former regime nor the new one. This is why the recently forged Kingdom of Travancore remained an autonomous Princely State, a faithful ally of the British Empire.

This is a critical benchmark in the history of Travancore which separates two patterns of governance - the indigenous cultures of administration before the British took over the administration proper (the period from 16th C to late 18th C) and the era of colonial dominion from nineteenth century to mid twentieth century, when the ruling legacy of Travancore compromised for a greater idea of India and later to the linguistic State of Kerala in 1956. A close study of the socio-political and economic cultures of the former period reveals the interesting designs of bureaucracy and changing narratives of power. The Kerala we know today was then, a jigsaw of numerous principalities. *Jati-janmi sambradaayam*/ Caste-feudal set up was deep seated and religiously followed. The chief juridical unit was Naadu (roughly translated to province). The various principalities were under the supervision of prosperous *janmikal* (plu) / landlords. The land and its produce were the monopoly of the high born while the lower castes were merely bodies for labour and exploitation.

Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal observe that the caste system was not a duel of black and white classes, but a spectrum of shades in between (146). These in-between *jatikal* (plu) / castes were given land owned by the nobles for *paattam*/tenure collectively known as *Kudikidappukkaar* (Kudi means a hut, house); they were allowed to cultivate crops in this land. They were given a small portion of their produce and were obliged to pay the land tenure to the *janmi* regularly. There was constant rivalry for power amongst various *janmikal* and some of these *janmikal* with the rapid accumulation of land and resources through heavy exploitation and manipulation acquired a large economic capital and rose to the stature of *Swaroopam*/holy figure. *Swaroopam* was the highest authority in a Naadu. Thus, by the late sixteenth century three prominent *Swaroopangal*(pl) could be identified - the *Perumbadappu Swaroopam* which dominated what is now the State of Kochi/ Cochin, the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam*(North) which ruled the lands of Kozhikode/Calicut

and the *Venad Swaroopam* (South). Besides these, there were other *Swaroopangal*(plu) of lesser significance, which were actually the matrilineal principalities (*Thaivazhikal*) of the three predominant *Swaroopangal* (150-155)

Travancore (Thiruvithamkoor in the vernacular records) was a small stretch of land that extended from Cape Comerin/ Kanyakumari to the current capital city of Thiruvananthapuram/ Trivandrum and was a principality under the *Venad Swaroopam*. With rapid success in land accumulation during the seventeenth century, the rising prosperity of the *Swaroopam* confronted the concentration of a large populace under single window supervision. Documentation, through division of labour, (this created employment opportunities, for the high and the noble castes of course) as a fundamental necessity and strategic administrative policy could very well have been a practical measure for the management of daily affairs, commercial transactions and juridical matters in the area. The availability of documents in abundance with regards to the three *Swaroopangal*, especially from this time period and the corresponding lack in others (for some, a complete absence as well) hence suggest their economic fortune, social stature and the paramount political influence in their respective constituencies (Varier and Gurukkal 165). This could also have been the impetus for initiating a sophisticated system of record keeping indicating detailed information about day to day transactions, proclamations, laws, statement of adequate actions towards problems in the provinces in traditional cadjan roles known as the *Grandhavari* (Varier & Gurukkal 20).

Venad Swaroopam now had an administrative system that resembled a government. In fact, Venad was the province which developed a government with proverthy as the smallest unit of administration (Varier & Gurukkal 166). 10-20 *proverthys* came under an administrative office/ *Mandapathum Vaathukkal*.

Each *Mandapathum Vaathukkal* had various *Kaaryakkaars*/ officers from the high castes, *Kanakkupillais*/accountants were appointed for regular revenue calculation and collection from the agricultural lands and they were responsible to the head officer or the *Sarvaadhikaaryakkaar*. Each *Swaroopam* had a

Sarvaadhikaaryakkar who was the highest official authority in that region. Venad's head officer in charge was locally known as *Adakki Sarvaadhikaaryakkaar*, (Cochin's *Paaliyathachan* and Calicut's *Mangaatachan*) (166, 182). *Dala-wa/ Diwan Peishkar / Diwan* were later variants of the same which evolved with foreign contact. Apart from revenue collection, resource management, trade and commerce policies, crime and punishment, the subject consciousness was also a vital element in what constituted a government. Apparatuses for the redress of grievances were crucial to ensure the participation of people and create a public/subject consciousness. The right to petition played a critical role in shaping a public sphere in Travancore during the colonial era, as suggested by Udaya Kumar in "Petitions as History: Dr.Palpu and Kerala's Pasts" 2 but the public opinion was homogenized most certainly by the elite and the intelligentsia.

Therefore, Venad's medieval records not only reveal a burgeoning modern administrative infrastructure but also various indigenous *modi-operandi* that served the very same purpose of petitions for communicating with the rulers. Records pronounce a proud public which dared to appeal to the ruling classes on grievances both dire and petty. For instance, *Uthirakura thookkal* was a predominant and common practice in Travancore. *Uthirakura* is a red coloured cloth which is hung on places very obvious for the ruler to notice, like at the entrance of big temples, the *nadakkaavu* or the pathway through which he goes out of his house and so on. The red cloth was usually a cloth smeared with the blood of the grieving or the complainant. The *Uthirakura thookkal* was often resorted to by the people, when the case involved murder, an attempt to murder or violence inflicted on them by other subjects of the land. Varier and Gurukkal point out to the records of *Uthirakura thookkal*, in the sixteenth century, for murder and violence committed on certain people. All people irrespective of caste distinctions could resort to this method. Lower castes could complain against higher castes, but of course the punishment was designated differently for different castes, the severity being inversely proportional to the hierarchy of caste 3.

The *Uthirakkura* was also used against the government. Records show an incident where the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple authorities killed one of the subjects of the land, and the people united in protest and hung the corpse in front of the temple entrance besides tying the *Uthirakkura* (191). Another prevalent practice was *pattini*/ starvation. Brahmins were invited to dine a sumptuous meal, but just before they could start having it, the complainant would come and say that he has such and such grievances and that they should not have their meal without finding an adequate solution to it. The Brahmins would get up and refuse to eat, leaving the house hungry. It was common knowledge that to make a Brahmin go hungry would invite nemesis unto oneself, so, usually the problem was addressed immediately and a resolution agreed upon. *Pattini* soon lost its original purpose of redressing grievances and acquired the stature of a ritual (193) This seems to be a privilege of the upper middle castes, especially those who were inside the social hierarchy to be able to serve food for the Brahmins, and hence, the disposal of justice or favour, through the method of starvation was probably directed towards the elite of the society.

One can easily notice the significance of *Uthirakura thookkal* which provided uniform access to people from all walks of life, to mark their presence and opinion, at a time when Kerala was a pious disciple of the caste system. Thus, it was a form of vehement protest as well as a means of redressing one's grievances; to put it more aptly, as Varier and Gurukual rightly point out, protests, whatever it be, was carried out in the form of a redress of grievance which simultaneously was meant to display their helplessness, the sorrow and frustration towards whatever may have befallen them (174). This symbolic realm of communication gradually gave way to a written archive because the practical need for documentation increased with the increasing number of people and their affairs a *Svaroopam* had to manage. It would have been a harrowing task to respond to numerous red

cloths of grievances and more importantly it would have been impossible for those who lived in far off settlements to make a symbolic gesture of grievance to the ruler who lived dozens of

miles away. *Grandhavarikal* (plu) showcase a gradually growing consciousness for meticulous documentation. Documents now, became the linchpin of legitimacy and authenticity which helped in normalizing institutions like bureaucracy based rigorously on the *jati-janmi sambraadaayam*. The growing sense for keeping records initiated a demand for literacy or a rising consciousness of the significance of literacy amongst the employees of the administration, rulers themselves and in general the mainstream society. More importantly, there was a demand for the generation of a certain level of shared knowledge among even those who could not read or write (194)

Throughout the period of 16th, 17th and 18th century, Venad underwent significant political changes that by the late eighteenth century its structural organization of documents began to resemble that of a centralized administration. But politically and culturally, the *Venad Swaroopam* could not transcend to a monarchic stature precisely because of the deep rooted formula of the *jati-janmi sambraadaayam* (186-189). The question whether the *Swaroopam vaazcha/ Swaroopam* rule actually had implications on a monarchy is significant. The attempts to legitimize one's supremacy through a false claim of being a descendant of *Kshatriyar/* the royal race, even though they already had a customary privilege of political authority and economic prosperity through the very same establishment of the *jati-janmi sambraadaaya* is rather interesting 4. The dominant *Swaroopam* had constant competition from other *janmis* of the same region and hence had to resort to methods which would give them some kind of supremacy over them. It is suggested that whatever be the kind, it was directed towards appeasing the layman, and not the high born or *janmis* who were competing for the same supremacy and probably would not pay heed to the claims of their political rival. It becomes less apparent now that even in a rigid system of *jati-janmi* establishments, popular opinion was a critical vector for the consolidation of legitimate power and political authority.

The acceptance of a ruler as their legitimate authority 'without force' has a peculiar aesthetic towards the successful establishment of a regime. The logic of this acceptance revolves around the

contemporary ideologies, beliefs and value systems of an episteme. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that there existed an active public sphere and a subject consciousness characteristic of a past episteme and it was ideologically engineered by the ruling elites; that this encouragement of an aesthetic interaction of the populace by the administration nevertheless was accompanied by the customary rigid exploitation of the masses is noteworthy. This is a benchmark example of the epistemological normalization of contemporary cultural designs. Petitions could have been one vector which was crucial to the assembly of people under an administrative head as they simultaneously reinforced the authority of those whom they addressed and offered an entry to the voice of the subjects into the rule.

However, a historical enquiry without taking into account the demography of a region would turn out to be baseless 5. Medieval Kerala was a land which was violated by innumerable water bodies. Neither motor transport nor electricity was present. The population was just around a few thousands; only a few lands were inhabited and the rest were grisly forests. The region recorded high mortality rates due to the absence of modern medicines and people died like flies at the outbreak of epidemics 6. In such a context, petitioning orally or in writing might be a very difficult task to accomplish. Thus the *Uthirakkurathookkal* would have been practiced and utilized widely by those who stay in close range with the authority's residence. Again, with the establishment of several *Mandapathum Vaathukkal* / administrative offices, people might have been able to petition to their nearest office. But whether such communications had been mediated in written or oral form remains to be investigated.

It is hard to pinpoint when writing began in Kerala; however, writing as a tool of bureaucracy must have taken roots after the growing consensus and approval of the requirement of documents for managing governmental affairs, which should be around the late seventeenth century. With the battle of Kulachal, Travancore

formed a tryst with the British and remained autonomous while Malabar and Madras were seized by the British directly under their rule. Varier and Gurukkal notice the ubiquitous

presence of written communication in Malabar and Wayanad by the eighteenth century: includes letters between company service men and businessmen in the French colony of Mahi (85), Kachirayan's haraji/harrji (Persian loan word for petition in Malayalam) in January 1798, regarding the exploits of Tipu Sultan and its impact on his life (99), a petition from the Christian subjects of Malabar to the British complaining the massacre of their lot by Haider Ali dated 1800 (101) etc. In the case of Travancore, being an autonomous princely state, the records are not so religiously preserved but affirmative trends of bureaucratic writing could be identified in the archives.

From *Grandhavarikal* one can notice the scattered yet continuous presence of written communication being exchanged within the *cutcherry*. (*Neetu* Vol 4 -7) *Neetu* is an official order or the statement of action taken by the administration as a response to a corresponding communication referred to as a *saadhanam*. A *saadhanam* could be received officially from the *kanakkupillai*/accountant or a responsible *kaaryakkaar*/subordinate officer regarding any existing problems in an area under his jurisdiction. It could also be requests for favours or the redress of grievances (*Neetu* Vol 4-7). Unfortunately the *saadhanam* is not archived, but the corresponding *neetu* is. One can only delineate that the *saadhanam* which reported such and such matters prompted the respective *neetu* in question. A typical *neetu* begins with the sentence, "From the communication received and the things which have been heard and observed, this is the holy *neetu* which is being issued regarding the....."

On a close observation, the *neetukal* (plu), had been actions taken with regard to extremely private matters like land ownerships, adoption of a child as the heir to the family, request for favours for donation to a temple for its annual festival, regarding theft, robbery, petty abuses and many more. (*Neetu* vol 4-7). Therefore, it is possible to interpret that these *saadhanangal* (plu), which dealt particularly with private matters and their orders directed towards a proper name in history, could be the earliest form of petitions in the land. Whether *saadhanam* was written or communicated orally is not clear. But this does not negate the

presence of a petition-like form, officially termed as *harji 7in* in a time and culture that preceded foreign contact. Whatever be the form in which the *saadhanam* may have been communicated to the corresponding officer, it was summarized and its response and judgement prepared in the form of an official order *neetu*, was documented unfailingly in writing, which formed a significant part of the administration's finance.

Therefore, it was not because of the lack of methodical writing in the native documentation that one cannot find petitions in its archive. The answer lies in the different orientations of the colonial government and the native government towards administration. It reflected much about their methods of recording and disposal of justice; it also throws light on why a *saadhanam* had not been archived but the corresponding *neetukal* (plu) were. The rulers of Venad gave supreme importance to the collection of revenue and therefore whatever affairs of the regime which contributed to the revenue or debited money from the government acquired importance. For instance, theft was one such affair where the culprit, if found had to pay compensation to the government. The victim would then be given a part of the revenue therein. Naturally, documents regarding the credit of money to the government in cases of theft run in abundance in the archives. (CA Neetu Vol 1 Pages 134–236) The native administration catered to the most practical needs of the government like managing the accounts, tallying the daily transactions and decisions made by the government, most of which involved matters of finance. Thus, the actual petition if any, had no need to be recorded but the orders furnished by the government in response to one would be archived, especially if it involved transaction of money. Moreover, the native archive, I believe, had not the objective of archiving for the far future; the native record-keeping system was to help manage the affairs of the present day and its preservation aimed a target of monthly review or perhaps an annual review at the most. Thus, the indigenous cultures of knowing reflect the filters of documentation during a time.

On the other hand, the British officers in Travancore had a Herculean task to labour through for they were responsible to

every inch to the Queen's regime. Documents had to be shipped to Britain, which took weeks to reach their destination and another week to deliver their response. The need for scrupulous documentation and a continuous narrative became indispensable and fundamental to the colonial rule. However, Bhabha quotes J.S. Mill's testimony to the House of Lords in 1852, where he makes an observation that "the whole Government of India is carried out in writing...there is no act done in India" but reported in writing and no reasons placed on record for why it was so. To Mill this was a greater security for good government (qtd 72). Writing, which was previously merely an aid or a tool to memory now became a text, a paradigm of evidence and truth and above all an episteme itself. Thus, the gradual change in disposition to writing may be explained via the sheer difficulty in managing a rule which was to be carried out simultaneously in two different time zones and cultural spaces. Perhaps, after the initial dexterity in writing genuinely, the authorities might have realized that written accountability was a blessing in disguise as they could manipulate and build anything in writing -things done, never done, and yet to be done - as already been accomplished. Interestingly, as this study would show, the very same realization of the rulers, was imbibed by the subjects too and they developed alternate regimes of articulation and manipulated the colonial technology of the "writing machine" and produced micro life-cultures.

The presence of a customary petitioning in a pre-colonial past is further attested by the trails of cultural signifiers which persisted in the vernacular petitions which were submitted to the British Government in Travancore. In Travancore too, as was in Europe, the 'religious' or the 'scriptural' was implanted and employed in the propaganda of the political. Just as Prahlada in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, exhorts the devotee to be an eternal 'krisna-dasa' (7:5:21), in the political history of Travancore we find that on 3 January, AD 1750, MarthandaVarma virtually "dedicated" Travancore to his tutelary deity Padmanabha of Padmanabhaswamy Temple (the *Trippadidaanam*) and from then on the rulers of Travancore ruled as the "servants of Padmanabha" (the Padmnabha-dasas). Any disrespect shown to the king was

considered equivalent to offending the deity. This political litany is exceptionally reflected in the vernacular petitions which were addressed to the British Government.

For example, a mercy petition from Varkkey Jacob sentenced to death under the Travancore criminal appeal case number 116, dated 6th December 1941, opens with this sentence: “Before the Holy feet(*trippadam*) of the Thiruvithamkoor Maharaja *Ponnuthamburan Tirumanassu*(Holy mind)”.(J 1942, f 36)

On the other hand, a petition from Savarimuthu Nadar, Pakyanathan Nadar requesting an interview with the Diwan is full of phrases and sentences with the metaphors closely associated with divinity like “Most Respected Diwan’s ‘Sannidhanam’ (sanctum sanctorium), “ let me be saved by ‘trippadam’, (holy feet), ‘darshanam’, ‘kataksham’ (spiritual bliss), ‘ucharanam’ (chanting the name of your Gracious Excellency), and finally ‘samarppanam’ (surrender or offer). (J 1947, f 1171) The petition encapsulates some of the nine ways of divine worship prescribed by Prahlada⁸.

In the case of the petitions submitted in the English language, the words were suggestive of the notion of ‘duty’ ‘charity’ and ‘honour’, as illustrated by the closures such as “I beg to remain or I have the honour to be /Your most obedient servant”, rather than that of a ‘complete surrender’, though both cultures preserved the divinity equation and the idea of citizenship as a mode of ‘service’ both to the King and symbolically to God. Thus, the difference in the poetics of the vernacular and the English petitions suggests the subtle yet significant religious and cultural ideologies and their consequent manifestations in the civil inscriptions. However, the antiquity of ‘*nivedhanam*’ remain only a tell-tale reality with not even a symbolic painting in history to substantiate its existence in ancient or medieval Travancore but there are certainly some tendencies which point to that end positively. The use of the term ‘petition’ was undoubtedly a colonial instigation.

The last decade of eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century was an interim period for the government of Travancore (1795-1857 to be precise); it was the brief period of governance

during which Travancore entered into a treaty with the East India company, until Britain took over India as a colony and ended the Company Raj in 1858. During Marthanda Varma's reign, Raja Kesava Das was the Diwan who was celebrated as the most illustrious minister of Travancore. V. Nagam Aiya in his *State Manual* (1906) narrates several instances to attest the character of the Travancore royalty. The first instance occurs while describing the rule of Diwan Raja Kesava Das which "was characterized by a wise tolerance to all religions" (412). Nagam Aiya quotes the description of one of the three missionaries who carried a letter of gratitude from the Pope for the exceptional treatment given by the Maharaja to the members of the church resident in Travancore. They mention submitting a written petition before the king and the manner of their reception in detail:

As soon as we made our appearance before the gate of the castle...the minister sent a guide to conduct the persons who bore our palanquin to the door of the palm-garden in which the King resided.... Here our coolies, or

palanquin bearers were obliged to remain behind us, lest being people of the lowest caste they might contaminate the royal palace.... He (the King) received us standing.... When the king had conversed on various topics he ordered his minister and secretary to give such an answer to our petition, and such relief to our grievances which we had specified in an *Ola* [palm leaf roll] that we might return home satisfied and easy. (Aiya, 413)

The passage illustrates the possibility of a custom of submitting petitions to the King though it does not prove anything to the affirmative.

During the same period, Nagam Aiya also notes two specimen provisions for dealing with petitioners as recorded in the 'Sattavariola'. It was a collection of rules and laws framed for the guidance of the various Sirkar officials and was formulated by Diwan Kesava Das as part of his immediate attention to the administrative reforms after the Treaty of 1795 with Tipu Sultan. The clauses pertaining to the treatment of petitioners are quoted below:

52-55, - When petitioners appear before the district cutcherry with their complaints, their cases shall be decided reasonably so as to be concurred in by public opinion but no petitioner shall be detained to his inconvenience and put to expense for feeding himself, pending the settlement of his case, that such cases as could be decided soon shall be settled then and there, and the parties dismissed. But such cases as require time to settle shall be decided within eight days, and if any petitioner is detained before the district cutcherry beyond eight days, he shall be fed at the expense of the district officer.

57-58, -When a female petitioner comes before the district cutcherry, her complaint shall be heard and settled at once and on no account, shall a female be detained for a night. (Aiya, 427)

Rules do not get made in a vacuum but are essentially responses to the socio-political interactions during a time. Therefore, these clauses which are specific to petitioners indicate strongly, the presence of a considerable number of petitions received in the district cutcherry and that these rules were ensued in response to the same. This is not surprising because Travancore in 1795 had managed a deal with Tipu Sultan who ravaged the kingdom causing death and havoc to the people. This would have resulted in an unprecedented increase of petitions submitted to the government seeking compensation for their losses. Again, it was during Raja Kesava Das's time that the first roads were built in Travancore facilitating easier transport between places within the kingdom (Kusuman 143). It could not be a coincidence that with the introduction of roads and better connectivity between places, there were an increase in the number of petitions submitted to the cutcherry.

In 1858, a translation of a copy of the rules formulated by Sir. T Madhava Rao, the then acting Diwan, regarding the rules for the submission of petitions could be found from the archives (CF 1858, f 15128, b 44) (See Appendix 1). By the mid nineteenth century, when the British had officially recognized India as its colony, Nagam Aiya observes the establishment of a 'Petition

Department' under the Resident's office, then managed by Diwan Nanoopillai in 1877 (567). Modernization of state infrastructure helped to widen the access of petitions geographically, but socially, it remained out of bounds for the poor as the registration of petitions required a fee and a further pay for the scribes 9. In 1890, another document appears in the archives- the Madras Government Petition Rules, which again point to the persistence of petitions in the cutcherries (See Appendix 2).

The take away from the arguments is that it was in fact the changing dispositions to writing 10 and not the artifice of writing itself that made the colonial petition modern. Therefore, it is not over-arching to suggest that the colonial petition rather trails a continuity more than discontinuity; it was neither the brainchild of the British, nor their modern incentive to the natives. Just as the cutcherry practices may be treated as a palimpsest of orientations to writing (Raman 14), the colonial petition may be seen as a palimpsest of the native practices of addressing the authorities. The question of the antiquity of the practice of petitioning in Travancore is already a persistent question for future research.

Deciphering the Discourse of Parley: Petitions in British Colonial Travancore

- 1) Petition from the Missionary of Venganoor regarding the redress of grievances of the Christians of his parish dated 1825 (CF 1825, f 15905, b 4) (See Appendix 3)

The petition opens quite authoritatively invoking reference to a letter of official communication that the petitioner received from the Acting Bishop of Cochin. The petitioner writes explicitly regarding the respect and consideration that his petition ought to receive from the authorities concerned. The reference to this official communication ensures genuineness and the legitimacy of the petitioner's cause. In short, the opening paragraph features a prologue which functions as an anticipatory bail for writing the petition. This anticipation is simultaneously accompanied by a self-assuring optimism evident in the line

“... that it is manifest that your Excellency has no hostile disposition towards the Christian Religion...being assured of

your Excellency's goodwill and disposition towards the Christians, I have no hesitation in laying before you the following grievances ...” (1)

There are four important grievances mentioned in the petition- 1) That the Christians be exempted from working on Sundays as it is Sabbath for them 2) that the Christian women be allowed to cover their breasts as per the permission granted by Her Highness the Rannee 3) that strict action be taken against those heathens who force Christian women to abandon their lawful husbands and go live with the former and 4) to reinforce the *Makkathayam* law of inheritance (where sons inherit the father's property) in Christian families and to effect the discontinuance of the *Marumakkathayam* (where the right of inheritance belongs to one's nephews).

The four issues point towards a nuanced picture of the changing socio-cultural contexts of Travancore; there was an increased number of conversions to Christianity between the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries chiefly through the influence of European missionaries from Germany and Denmark. A nuanced knowledge of the region's introduction to and interaction with Christianity is imperative to understand the premises of the petition. The history of Kerala's contact with Christianity shows three distinct waves of influence. The earliest being the Syrian Christians/*Siriyan Kristyani/ Nasrani*, an elite community which flourished in Kerala from as early as the sixth century claiming their origin from two legends- as descendants of a Namboodiri Brahmin community's conversion to Christianity and the Thomas of Cana legend. The second wave struck in the early sixteenth century with the landing of Portuguese on the Kerala coast and resulted in the Latin Catholic Christians, the members of which were mostly the fishermen community even up to this day and the third wave targeted the backward communities and this was under the Missionaries from Germany and Denmark during the British Raj and was called New Christians/Neo-Christians or *Putiya Kristyani* (Fuller 55). The lower castes were immensely drawn towards the Christian ideals of equality among all and accepted Christianity whole-heartedly. What awaited them was a tragic repetition of caste hierarchy in

the new mould of Christian religion. Dalits (which included all the underprivileged castes of the pulayars, parayars and so on) who converted to Christianity came to be accepted only as Dalit Christians and were discriminated in Church service and even denied entry into certain Churches 1.

Thus, a change in religion (in this case from Hinduism to Christianity) remained ineffective because it carried the institutions of one into the other, chiefly the caste system. Caste discrimination could gnaw its way through a new religion only because of the presence of a group of elite castes. One such group were the Syrian Christians who shared a hostile attitude towards the missionaries in making Christianity the “Religion of pariahs” (Fuller 59) - the lowest of the low castes. Interestingly, studies report that a small portion of the high castes also joined this third wave of conversion, particularly the Nairs but it did not amount much, and neither did it continue (Mateer 298).

The first concern of the petition with regards to exempting Christians from working on Sundays certainly marks a unique privilege to Christians. This also means that Christians were until then working on Sundays. A history of work ethic in the Western culture shows how the Protestant theology was intrinsically intertwined with the secularization of capitalist ideology, which would later colonize the work culture of India and half of the world by the end of nineteenth century. Regular hard labour, less leisure and scrupulous use of time, deferment of pleasure and accumulation of profit became eulogized as opposed to them being condemned during the Classical and Medieval ages. Feudalism got its death blow with Lutheran and Calvinist philosophies which affirmed equal dignity to all work and supported the right to engage in the work of one’s own choice and not that in which he was born into. (Rodger 1-9) The premise of work, its nature and ethic was predominantly feudalistic in Travancore as elsewhere in India in the sixteenth century when the British came. The insanely strong network of the *jati-janmi sambraadayam*/caste-feudal system and the *kulathozhil sambraadayam*/ the system of family occupation 2, made it grossly difficult for the British to procure labour in the native soil. The nature of work before the pre-colonial era was seasonal in terms of agriculture. Regular labour was non-existent

partly because of this and also because pay was not yet in cash but in kind. According to Varier & Gurukkal, daily wage labour was non-existent even after a century of British entry into Travancore (128). However, introduction of Christianity and conversion changed the traditional ancestral society gradually into a modern capitalist economy. Christianity came in a comprehensive package which precluded laws of inheritance, work ethic, nature and morality. This demanded socio-economic reforms for a group of people who belonged to Christianity, and in the context of Kerala, this group was predominantly the Dalits.

Work was one sector which witnessed major revisions from a past social economy. As members of the lower castes, these groups were primarily farmers. Missionary intervention also brought in education as a reformist philosophy, but English education was as practical knowledge would tell us preferable to young people. The adults could only access theological education in the Churches. So, a majority of adult population must have continued to seek livelihood in the agricultural sector even though now, as Christians they were released from the bonds of *kulathozhil*. Besides, the early nineteenth century, precisely when the petition is dated, was just witnessing the first few steps of the Protestant educational reforms in Travancore. Daily wage labour might still not have come into existence, as the exemption from work for a day would mean a loss of pay for the Christians who are already poor. Thus, the petition refers to the grievances of a very specific group of Dalits who converted into Christianity during the third wave of religious conversions in Kerala, who belonged to the untouchable *jati*, who were chiefly adult farmers, perhaps a year or a few months into their life as Christians and facing the initial struggles and straddles of this religious translation. Thus, the request for exempting this group from working on Sunday emerges as a precarious privilege to them from the social landscape of those who remained unconverted from the Dalit community and other working-class Hindu communities.

The third point in the petition relating to the conflict of two laws of inheritance brings to light the presence of caste Hindus, especially the Nairs, amongst those converted during the third wave. In the traditional society of Travancore, only

the Nair community followed matriliney/*marumakkathayam* and thus emerges a premise for a conflict of laws of inheritance in an incomplete translation of two incompatible socio-economic institutions. In 1829, the Travancore government passed a resolution making clear the right of inheritance of Christian subjects to the son and not the nephew, favouring the recent converts (CF 1829, f 16404, b 5). However, the C. M. S reported in 1857, that there were hardly ten Nairs among its 5000-6000 converts (Jeffrey 56). Two questions arise at this juncture. What motivated the Nairs to accept Christianity during this time? Why were the converts so meagre even by the year 1857? The present petition reveals one possible reason for it. As to why the Nairs opted to Christianity might lie in their internal inheritance conflicts. Historians and critics agree to the deep rooted internal conflicts in a Nair family household which used to perpetually boil in issues between sons, nephews and the maternal uncles 4. The Christian right of inheritance, the *makkathayam* was perhaps most inviting to the sons but put the nephews invariably in a plight who might have harboured hopes of inheriting the family property. But to see that the nephews did not refrain from converting to Christianity (as suggested by their Christian names) also points to a new chapter in the theses behind the conversion ethics of the natives. It debunks the hegemonic notion of conversion of the natives as merely for material gain. Yes, there were explicit material prospects in conversion, but to think of it as a monopoly in the motive behind accepting another religious faith is to reduce the ambit of this significant reformative phase in colonial history. Under these circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine the possibilities of a spiritual inclination to the new faith which professed equality and a new rationale of life and livelihood at least in theory, though it took years to see them put into practice. Although rules were directed to the public regarding the new right of inheritance to the converts whatever be their community before conversion, as this petition reveals, there existed a transition period, whereby the people had to pay for the incomplete translation they undertook. This is why for Dolly and Histram, the nephews of Peter, the thought of losing the ancestral property which would have been lawfully theirs, as

had been in their imagination till now, triggered an attempt to win it back to themselves.

This transitional phase might have triggered an awkward conversion strategy where the sons in the Nair families might have chosen to convert but the nephews fearing the loss of property might have remained intact. Since nephews inherited property, the converted sons could not possibly inherit any property. Thus, this could have been a critical factor hindering the prospects of the Nair community's conversion to Christianity which explains the C.M.S report of 1857 mentioned above. It would therefore, not be wrong to say that the Nair impulse to convert remained predominantly within the compass of material vision. And thus, it could be certainly said that it was the Dalits who imbibed the spiritual philosophy of Christianity for they stayed within Christianity though they were met with the most unfair deal initially.

The second point mentioned in the petition relates to the Breast Cloth Revolt—Maarumarakkal Samaram (1815-1859) colloquially known as the Channar Lahala / Channar Revolt⁴. As the name suggests the revolt took off from the women of the Channar caste (spelt 'Shannar' also, as many letters and officials correspondence show) who dared to cover their breasts which was an exclusive upper class privilege. The upper castes became furious with this atrocious disdain of the lower castes and considered it as an audacious scar to their social prestige (Bini 1-2). The Channars who converted to Christianity were allowed to cover their breasts as per the orders by Col. John Munroe, the acting Diwan of Travancore during 1814 and 1815. This is evident from the letter of reply from the Acting Bishop of Cochin, Rev. Fr. Joaquim Neves dated January 1829 in response to Col. William Morrison, the political resident in Travancore during 1829 (See Appendix 4). The Bishop however informs the Colonel, the fact that,

the orders were reworked by a Decree of Her Highness the Ranee of Travancore, on account of the said commotions by the Shoottree, and Her Highness only permitted the new converted women of the Shanar castes to cover their

breasts with jacket/ *Cooppayam*, but not in a manner of the women of the Shoottree of Nayar Caste. I have not the copy of the Decree but it was a public fact at that time viz, in the year 1814 or 1815 and since that time the new converted women of the Shanar caste have not been allowed to cover their breasts otherwise, and even this [the order by Col. Munroe and the Rannee's Decree], was a great benefit for the said Christian Women because previously to that time they were not permitted to cover their breasts in any manner whatsoever (CF 1829 f 15905 b 4).

Thus, the issue was two-fold; opposing initially the covering of breasts and then opposing the manner in which it was covered. The demand for not emulating the upper caste manner of covering their breasts suggests the epistemic value of strictly keeping distinctions and difference, which indeed was the epistemic violence towards the subaltern segments 5.

From the Missionary's appeal in the petition to allow the Christian converts to cover their breasts dated 1829, it is clear that despite the passing of official orders and a Royal Decree, the Channar women were not allowed to cover their breasts. In no way do I mean to suggest that the women in question in the petition belong to the Channar caste, but it is definitely possible that they could be. The Channar women were joined by a group of Ezhava women also in their struggle (Hardgrave 56) so these women could be a mix of both groups. During 1813-1829, there were several grants and withdrawals regarding this single issue of the breast cloth. The orders of Col. Munroe in 1813, granting permission to cover the breasts in any manner was reworked by the Rannee, in a manner not offending the upper caste sentiments, either by wearing a jacket or "Cooppayam" like the Syrian Christians or by tying a coarse cloth over the breasts like the *Mukkuvathikal* /low caste fisher women. The Channar women were unsatisfied and they broke out in violent revolts demanding equality by emulating the upper-class manner of covering breasts. In 1859, the King of Travancore, under pressure from Charles Travelyan, the then Madras Governor, issued a proclamation which gave legitimate permission to all Channar women to cover their breast for sheer decency (55-70).

The given petition taps an interim period or a moment in this almost half-a-century-long revolt. The petition dated 1825, is remarkable for punctuating this temporal space from 1815 to 1829 during which significant as they are, the decision of not allowing the converts to mimic the upper caste manner of wearing breast cloth was issued. While externally the movement took violent forms of bloody revolts, sexual molestations, killings and lootings, between the caste Hindus and the Channars and women daring to walk in public with their breasts covered, in the internal engines of bureaucracy there was an arduous negotiation on the part of the Missionaries to seal a deal favourable for those who embraced their faith.

It marks a sensitive period of transition for the new Channar converts, especially the women, who would have been curious and overwhelmed at the same time to assuage this palpable new right of covering their breasts. Many who had the right refused to cover them initially, just out of not having been used to do so⁶ but eventually embraced this new fashion. Thus, the new converts would certainly have been in a dilemma primarily as to whether to cover their breasts, as they now have the right to do so as a Christian and secondly, if they do cover, how would they do so? Should they wear a jacket or tie a coarse cloth like other women of faith in the region do? Especially, now that with Munro's orders they are entitled to cover their breasts in any manner they want. It is interesting to see that they did not chose a unique manner for themselves like the other Christian women did as a mark of their community and caste, but instead chose to emulate the caste Hindu way of wearing breast cloth.

Perhaps this could have been one way of moral resistance of demanding freedom through equality. This is significant evidence to the fact that conversion echoed the spiritual message of Christianity too in the converts and was not merely directed towards material prospects. If the sheer frustration of being brutally marginalized by the caste system, and the spiritual inclination towards Christianity which preached the equality of all men is what turned them to the Christian faith, then their aim would be not to devise a unique method of dressing to mark their

identity, as it would emulate and reinforce the whole trope of the Hindu caste system again. They would rather aim to demolish the *jati-samudaaya* (caste-community), the network which was the backbone of Hindu logic of discrimination by sporting the same cloth and manner of wearing it as the caste Hindus as an act of achieving uniform civil code. The emulation would not be a repetition of the caste symbols, but a subversion of it instead, as the Channar body wearing the upper cloth in the upper caste fashion would be adversely and audaciously different from the upper caste continuing its fashion.

Col. William Morrison's letter of 1829 to the Acting Bishop of Cochin seeks his reply as to whether he had noticed some "pretensions" of the Channars to dress up their women in a fashion similar to the upper caste (CF 1829 f 15905 b 4). This affirms the previous point mentioned that there began a tendency on the part of the newly converted Christian women to emulate the upper caste fashions, which seems to be a form of resistance to subvert the very distinctions of the Hindu caste system.

Obviously, this pitched badly against the upper caste sentiments and hence they disallowed the Christian women from wearing thus. It would be wrong to suggest that this petition might have triggered the 1829 Royal Decree by the Rannee, and moreover that is not the significance of it anyway. The given petition captures a burgeoning moment in the history of the Breast Cloth Revolt, when the newly converted third wave Christians ushered in the tendency to emulate the practices of the upper caste but was met with strong opposition. The petition symbolizes a form of civil resistance, which was perhaps one among the numerous petitions sent in this regard, and hence marks the first chapter in the long expanse of the revolt.

The final point that the petitioner wishes to be addressed is the atrocious behaviour of "some heathens" who force the Christian women, to marry them, though they are lawfully wed to other men- yet another indicator of the conflicting institutional practices of Nair and Christian systems. The Nair men could engage in surplus affairs or loose marital bonds of no intrinsic value / *sambandhams* with as many women as they wanted from

the lower castes. This could be married or unmarried women, but as lower castes they were obliged to gratify the needs of the upper caste (Varier & Gurukkal 216). The issue mentioned could be the mirror reflecting a period of social uncertainty on both the sides –The Nair, here referred to as the heathens 7 struggles to accommodate the new identity of the Christian convert, who was hitherto a low caste woman, who succumbed to his desires. For the Christian woman, this is a moment to reclaim her identity through the new moral code of Christianity by resisting the advances of the upper caste. It also has to be acknowledged here that the case in point could be very specific to a particular group in the given region, for which again, the petition's relevance is highlighted.

Above all, the Missionary, who assumes the narrating voice in the petition, is the mediating presence between the authority and the subjects. He represents the voice of the newly converted Christians of his parish, who neither have the knowledge or the means to communicate to the new governmental order of Travancore (the autonomous princely state of British India). The figure of the representative is very important here in such cases as this, where a privileged patronage is crucial for timely and adequate redress. The Missionary is a privileged subject of the Empire and hence of the local Government. The logic of Christian faith and law with which his arguments are constructed is also bound to receive a favourable attention at the hands of the authorities. The petition is also one of the earliest markers of the system of political representation which involved representation by patronage, often through a single person. This was an initial mould which later gave way to a collective representation symbolized by individual signatures which led towards electoral politics.

The missionary's fashioning of a self-affirming, stoic persona, who is ever more assured of a favourable response from the authorities is noteworthy.

- 2) Petition from the Representatives of the Latin Catholics to the Diwan of Travancore dated 1947(J 1947, f 2747) (See Appendix 5).

Petitions played a vital role in shaping a public sphere in Travancore during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries for they mediated political thought and mobilized public opinion (Kumar 2-4). The early late nineteenth century witnessed the culmination of the initial phase of a rise of public consciousness with the formation of three communal organizations – the Syrian Christian Jatiakya Sangham, the Nair Malayali Memorial and the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. This was soon followed by the Malayali Memorial (1891) and the Ezhava Memorial (1896). The twentieth century saw the birth of *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (SNDP) (1903), and finally the Nair Service Society (NSS) (1914) and the Travancore State Congress (1938). Just by looking at the catalogue itself, one can observe the consolidation of sectarian/communal interests in the electoral politics. However, as many historians and critics have affirmed, and as James Chiriyankandath unpretentiously puts, that associations were the “talking shop of representatives” of elites from the respective communities (648).

In this context, the petition which dates 18 July 1947 marks a politically tempestuous period in Travancore with a re-configuration of the ‘people’ - the propensity towards a citizenship consciousness from a colonial subject, a consolidation of sectarian interests characterized by an unhealthy political rivalry in the background of a freedom movement and the hopes of a liberal democratic future gaining momentum. The petition, by virtue of being placed just a year after the severe political unrest in the State, organized by the Travancore State Congress against the misrule and tyranny of Diwan Sir C.P Ramaswamy Iyer is interesting. (In 1946, mocking the brave initiatives of the Congress, the government passed some critical administrative reforms by virtue of which all the powers were returned to the Diwan (Daniel 47-50))

The Latin Catholics were predominantly converts of the second wave initiated by the Portuguese. They were predominantly fishermen and a recognized backward community (Fuller 57). Between the previous petition and the given one, there is a time lapse of a century and more. The Latin Catholics did not use a religious patron to speak for them. The “representatives” of Latin

Catholics definitely refers to the elite in their group too, but such a selective representation does not subsume into one voice, instead the 'We' permeates throughout the petition. This is symptomatic of the change in the socio-political ambience of the region, but more importantly, it gives an important insight into the change of nature of the bureaucratic reception of public opinion and the change of nature of public approach; the changing patterns of public reception of authority and the bureaucratic approach towards public opinion.

Firstly, from the nineteenth century, the Missionaries in Travancore were chiefly Protestants from Germany and Denmark. So up till the introduction of the Public Service Commission (PSC), they had no exclusive representation. With the establishment of PSC in 1935, the mobilization of the backward communities finally showed a tendency of actualization (Menon 209). However, this was an incredibly gradual process, (which up to this day has not produced satisfactory results). This is a brief background of the petition in question. Read in this context, the petition reveals a micro narrative that attested itself amidst a politically tense and reflective period in Travancore history.

"The Latin Catholics have always been a loyal and law-abiding community" (1). No more can a statement be called 'point blank' than this one. The first paragraph elaborates the above argument of being 'loyal' and a 'law-abiding community'. 'Loyal' and 'law abiding' are two recurring adjectives in several petitions (CF 1800-1901, J 1913-1918, 1921-1935, 1947,49, 55) which seem to have gained an aesthetic currency, a favourable stamp which makes a legitimate cause for presenting a grievance. To promise loyalty and abide by the law is the premise with which the authority has granted the right to petition. But, in the specific context of this petition, the words have a resounding appeal as the government must be most desirous of a loyal party on its side in the tempestuous political tide it had been swept through recently. Interestingly the petition draws in the Diwan himself as the witness to certify the loyalty and lawfulness of the Latin Catholic community. This suggests the simultaneous declaration of their good conduct and behaviour as a public fact, hence giving a tendency of self-affirmation and confidence besides saving

them the need to elaborate particular instances to support their argument. By equating themselves to the honest and the genuine folks, and their opponents to diplomats, they propose to assume to be the needy, the naïve and the helpless. However this is also an unconscious acknowledgement that they have indeed realized diplomacy as the skill of politics.

The rhetoric of the petition is noteworthy. By the 1940s, a gradual break from the earlier generic form of the petition can be observed (J 1939, 1940, 1942, 1945, 1947, 1948 & 1950) “We believe Your Excellency will not misunderstand us when we say that this grievance of the Latin Catholics is legitimate and has therefore to be rewarded” (1). In the above statement, there is a not-so veiled declaration and a staunch demand that their grievance is legitimate and therefore should be redressed. The flourish, grandeur and uneasy politeness of the previous century begin to make way for a simple and seemingly genuine rhetoric of appeal. Though the petitioner narrates his life and issues in a manner which seemingly legitimizes his reason for grievance, he was never entitled, or he never dared to declare it as legitimate; this decision was the exclusive privilege of the Government. The demands were pleasantly camouflaged in the ornate style and judicious use of language. The petitions from early nineteenth century to even the early twentieth century conform to this norm. However, by the mid-twentieth century, the ornate style is visibly replaced by simple, plain English. The excessive humility and literary flourish still persisted in some cases. To be sure, collective petitions conformed to this new breakaway pattern while individual petitioners still “begged” and “prayed” for justice.

Collective petitions transformed into something like a decorous threat deploying signals of warning towards an imminent revolt. The above petition employs the most common logic of comparison with other communities painting themselves as efficient but poor and innocent while the other as cunning and better off than they are:

While Communities who are not in any way better than we in higher education have been treated with greater consideration and favour. Therefore, it becomes all the

more difficult for us to persuade the Community to join us in the loyal and law-abiding stand we have taken (2).

The implication is stark clear that they have reached the threshold of conforming to the notions of civility, by remaining calm, loyal and respecting the law established by the Government. It shall no longer be the case if such negligence towards the community persists. On a second look, the use of a veiled threat is further deferred by distancing the petitioners' subject position from that of the community. They make it transparent that it will be very difficult for 'them' to persuade the 'community' to remain obliged to the law of the state, even though they themselves would abide by the law at all times.

The demand for more representations in the public sector for the Latin Catholics, especially when every other community rivals for the same interest, is a definite source of uneasiness for the government. Therefore, it cannot be left uncommented that when they write, "Ours is a community which can be easily satisfied as our ambitions are limited by the qualified hands available among us." (2), it displays a rare critical insight into the bureaucratic engineering of power.

The paramount plea expressed in the petition is to offer the educated and highly qualified men in the Latin Catholic community in the Revenue, Excise, Magistracy and Secretariat. The mention of the Revenue department is important since in 1922 the Revenue Department was divided into Devaswom and the Revenue. This was due to the collective efforts of the Christians and Muslims, as part of the Civil Rights movement which aimed to bring in equality amongst all communities in their representations in the public service which was since then grossly monopolized by the Hindu elite. This discrepancy of representation was most discernible in the Revenue department which managed the affairs of the Hindu temples and hence the Hindu elite did not entertain a non-Hindu into this sector. As a result of the Civil Rights movement which demanded an equal representation of the Christians and the Muslims into the Revenue department, the Devaswom, which would manage the Hindu temples exclusively now, was created, and a Revenue

sector was generated which would manage finance in the other spheres of the society (Menon 209). Thus, it safeguarded the interests of the Hindus and procured a fair deal to the protesting non-Hindus. The petition reveals that even by 1947, the Revenue which was reconfigured to include the non-Hindu community's interests repeated a tendency of incongruous representation whereby the top-level administration was still a homogeneity of Hindu or elite non-Hindu communities. Thus, the backward communities like Latin Catholics had to succumb to clerical and management posts even though they were equally qualified men.

It is quite interesting to note that the representatives of the Latin Catholic community decided to write a petition to the Diwan of Travancore requesting placements in the public service in the socio-economic context of English education and Public Service Commission, both seemingly in their most accommodative phase. English education was made extensively available to all fractions of the society as part of the earnest endeavours of the Missionary commissions and the PSC began recruiting people from hitherto unrepresented communities as an offshoot of the fast-paced consolidation of communal interests. This begs the question as to why there comes a demand for more representation and recruitment especially when Travancore was historically in the high tide in terms of development, employment and education. The answer lies exactly at the epicentre of a triangle whose vertices are the establishment of PSC, the success of English education among the youth and the increased awareness of sectarian interests and representational rights- a 'cultural unemployment'. The purchase of an unprecedented interest and appeal towards employment in the Public Service which was triggered by the stark increase of an educated and eligible youth population coupled with the conscious consolidation of caste and community specific interests in order to access a better social stature, cost a crisis of 'cultural unemployment'.

Thus by 'cultural unemployment' (if the usage may be permitted), I refer to a crisis of unemployment induced by specific cultures of socio-political and economic networks of exchange. The cultural differences and social change affect the nature and aesthetics of, and attitude towards work. It generates a hegemonic

mode of employment towards which the whole social energy and impulse of a region is targeted whereby the eligible work force in that region grossly exceeds the labour in demand and creates a crisis of unemployment⁹. The period in which the people of Travancore faced an emergency of unemployment, as I argue, was also the period recognized in history as one of escalated social progress delivering high literacy rates and a huge relief from the perturbed discriminations regarding representation in the public service. This happens because the rate of social progress is often determined by the rate of literacy achieved and the increase of representations in government service by the inclusion of less privileged sections. However, these petitions and the case they behold show nuanced contradictions in the big picture, even though they may be temporary.

In a specific space, time and culture, is induced an unprecedented aesthetic appeal for a particular type of employment; in this specific spatio-temporal culture, more than three quarters of the population is eligible for this certain employment either due to socio-economic progress or precisely because they equipped themselves to be eligible for it as it is the most coveted social and economic position during the time. When ten equally qualified candidates compete for three vacancies, there is a critical unemployment. Hence, a phase of cultural unemployment could be observed in the context of the petition and it beautifully maps this interstitial cultural space whereby sectarian politics and a high percentage of literacy in Travancore created unwarranted anxieties for livelihood and economic stability. The mass fetish for white-collar jobs in the state probably began around this time. The problem will be revisited again in the analysis of the petitions that follow, which illustrate other sides of this phenomenon.

- 3) Case of Bhagavathy Amma, Changamula Puthen Veedu, Kurumathoor, Kuzhithurai, (1933-1934) (J 1934 f 1874) (See Appendix 6).

Bhagavathy Amma was appointed as an acting copyist when a clerk in the Kuzhithura Stationary Magistrate's court took leave. She was relieved from the job as soon as the clerk came back on duty. When a temporary vacancy was available, she

was called again to work in the same court for a month. But when a permanent vacancy occurred in the post of a copyist, the District Magistrate overlooked her qualification and experience and appointed one C.K Krishna Pillai, whom she alleges, is less qualified than her. She sends three petitions—two in Malayalam and one in English during the year 1933 and one in Malayalam again in the year 1934 in vain for the redressal of her grievance.

In 1934, Ponnu Nadar, Choruckuvilai, Nelvaly Dasam, Nattalam Pakuthy, sends a petition pertaining to the same issue of unfair appointment made by the District Magistrate but alleges Bhagavathy Amma's claim for the post as misplaced and that he deserves it owing to his early service and qualification (27-28) (See Appendix 7) The Magistrate and the Chief Secretary of the Government had approved the appointment of C.K Krishna Pillai to the post of copyist. The case is noticed and forwarded for reports from the Magistrate.

On 9/1/1934, as per the request of the Diwan the District Magistrate P.Viswanatha Aiyer, writes a report back (13). According to him, C.K Krishnapillai had more years of service and experience than Bhagavathy Amma and hence his decision to favour him for the post and not Bhagavathy Amma (13-14). C.K Krishnapillai, however states that he does not remember exactly when he was appointed as an acting copyist. He also states that after he was relieved from the copy section, he joined the Education Department as an acting teacher for several months (19). Ponnu Nadar's petition on the same case must have ushered in concern from the government as now there are two claimants for the same post. At the behest of the Chief Secretary, the District Magistrate seeks a list of the names of all those who are senior to Bhagavathy Amma as per the waiting list (6 & 23). Such a decisive order must have come from Ponnu Nadar's petition from which the possibility of the District Magistrate overlooking more deserving candidates must have received reasonable suspicion.

From observing all the names forwarded by the District Magistrate (43-47), the Chief Secretary writes a detailed report and arrives at a conclusion (49-51). The report says definitively that the District Magistrate had overlooked the claims of thirty

one persons including Bhagavathy Amma, out of which 10 belonged to the backward community of the Nadars and three were ladies from the Ezhava community, all more qualified than C.K Krishnapillai. He is shrewd enough to observe that the Magistrate's report is silent about Bhagavathy Amma's allegation that the person appointed by him is a relative of his. The report of the Secretary is worth quoting here at this instance as it is a brilliant critical analysis (See Appendix 8):

The statement forwarded by the district Magistrate is illustrative not only of the acuteness of unemployment and the struggle for employment among the educated youth of the state but it affords also a striking instance of how Heads of Departments and other authorities vested with powers of appointments can ride rough-shod over the just and legitimate claims of unfortunate candidates, irrespective of considerations of backwardness or forwardness of communities or the equitable claims established by superior qualifications or prior entertainment in service.

It is for consideration whether, when such flagrant violations of the elementary principles and rules of recruitment to public service come to the notice of the Government, the appointment concerned does not merit cancellation by government and issue of orders to confirm the rightful claimant with a view to call in to order such officers of the Government who abuse the confidence vested in them by Government in the exercise of powers and patronage pertaining to their official position.

Beg orders

Dated 1/5/1934 (50)

The Diwan in writing expresses his absolute agreement with the Chief Secretary hoping this may be the last of such case, and that if they repeat, "it will be necessary to withdraw all powers of appointment from such officers" (50). He orders for the cancellation of Krishna Pillai's appointment and the senior most in the waiting list be appointed as the copyist.

The Secretary's remarks drive home two central issues as regards the case- that of the surging unemployment felt in the

state, if not reported officially. On a rather hasty note, it may be observed that this apparent unemployment, what I referred to as the cultural unemployment previously, was felt even before the establishment of PSC. Thus, to be sure, the tendency towards this crisis could already be palpable, and that PSC only hastened its accretion. Secondly, the report makes a scathing attack on the officers (here, the District Magistrate) who are vested with high powers and great responsibilities as service to the Government, blatantly misusing it to their own personal interests. This is a clear instance of the exposure of the conduct of the sub-ordinate officers of the government. Bhavani Raman in her ingenious study *Document Raj*, argues that petitions were utilized by the Raj to monitor the work and conduct of the native sub-ordinate officers whom they always accused were symptomatic of the asiatick corruption¹⁰ during the nineteenth century in Madras (Raman 26). Bhagavathy Amma's allegations against the District Magistrate and she being proven right only affirms this point that the petitions offered a strategic surveillance technology for the colonial officials on the native officers.

The case in point also exemplifies how petitions shape and culture narratives of resistance to bureaucratic hegemony; that such resistive narratives always take the mould of redressing one's grievances is noteworthy. Bhagavathy Amma's grievance is the unjust treatment meted out to her by the District Magistrate. She makes the strong allegations of the Magistrate favouring one of his relations; this prominently figures in her vernacular petitions, which however is omitted in the petition in English. The petition dated 9/9/1933, in English narrates her misery of being unemployed and having to bear the burden of looking after six members in her family (5). Ponnu Nadar's Petition dated 6/3/1934 on the other hand utilizes the backwardness of his community and higher qualification: "I belong to the unrepresented Nadar community" (25). A backward communal identity, seniority and eligibility gave him a three-fold legitimacy for his demand. It is worthwhile to note how caste/community becomes the political capital i.e., a positive capital for the backward communities at this juncture¹¹.

Considering the fact that the British entertained such complaints about the sub-ordinate corruption, it is quite surprising that four of her petitions which tried appealing in both ways of accusing officers and narrating a poverty-ridden household did not receive attention. But a closer look suggests that perhaps other factors contribute to her negative reception. The tone and rhetoric of the petitions which were neither so humble nor submissive enough to beg or stoop before the authority might be one reason. All of Bhagavathi Amma's vernacular petitions are staunch and point-blank statements even though she requests "that this injustice be reverted and I be appointed and a fair solution be brought about to this. I shall come at the arrival of the notice" [to the cutcherry] (3). Her English petition is more submissive, mellowed and begs His Excellency to dispose of her case at the earliest and thereby give her due justice¹² (7).

Another reason, might be because of the allegation itself; this suggests a certain foul play on the part of the officials who handled the petition by not forwarding it to the superiors, either in agreement with the District Magistrate or as a moral concern of demeaning themselves as an allegation on any one of them (officers of the same hierarchy) would directly affect their reputation and stature in the Service. It is also interesting to notice that none of these vernacular petitions have an English summary prepared by the copyist in the Petition Department. This is reason enough to suspect that her petitions did not get forwarded after a certain administrative hierarchy in the Government.

At a time when there were numerous petitions complaining about the conduct of the sub-ordinate native officials chiefly in the hierarchies of the Magistrate, the Tahasildar, the Superintendent of Police, the Commissioner of Police etc. this must have been a resistive measure taken by the officers themselves (C. S 1924, 25, 26, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37). Since Bhagavathy Amma and Ponnu Nadar are part of the bureaucracy or more precisely was once part of this realm of power, however much her grades were low, it becomes all the more curious to see the development of a meta-narrative behind the documents of this lettered city¹³.

Bhagavathy Amma and Ponnu Nadar did not get their grievance redressed even though the petitions were finally addressed. But it certainly exposed Viswanathan Aiyer, the District Magistrate. Both their petitions were counter narratives to each other and to the hegemonic narrative of Magistracy, but remarkably enclosed in the guise of a grievance needing redress. This guise, i.e., the genre of petition, was the only mode available to them which marked civility, and also a narrative whose framework rests in the realm that they both want to return, i.e., bureaucracy.

- 4) The Case of N. Bhagavathi Pillai, Trivandrum (1934-35) (C.S 1935, f 1471, b 30) (See Appendix 9).

On 24/7/1934, N. Bhagavathy Pillai of Trivandrum, a former Lower Grade Clerk in the Secretariat, who had worked from 1924 to the 4th January 1933, sends a petition to the Maharaja of Travancore praying for his reinstatement in Government Service. return, i.e., bureaucracy.

Bhagavathi Pillai's petition (1-6) is an explanation on his part of the crime he was convicted and dismissed for; he was held responsible for publishing an official confidential matter which he had access to in the 'Travancore Times' on 13/12/1932. The matter concerned some extracts about the election of a President to the Nagercoil Municipality.

According to Bhagavathi Pillai, since the file had been reported as circulating in Nagercoil a day before the actual publication of it, it was confirmed by the police that he was the culprit since the then Chief Secretary had given the file to him to send it to Bhaktivilas. It was alleged that he had taken notes of the extracts and given it for publishing in the paper. And on 6/1/1933 he was served with a copy of the proceedings of the Chief Secretary to Government informing him of his dismissal from the service on the charges of having disclosed confidential government information (2-3). On 20/4/1935 he sends another petition on the same matter to the Diwan with a few additions and different details.

Pillai's petition says that the enquiry was partial and the charges against him most cleverly fabricated. Not all the clerks

were enquired and their explanation sought but that he was deliberately singled out by the then Chief Secretary Mr. George. The police did not conduct an impartial enquiry but were more concerned about framing him. He was then transferred to the English Records section as punishment for which act he submitted his resignation as he felt it tended a blot on his reputation. The most crucial point of his defence in the petition is that the file in question was in his custody only for a few minutes which was too less a time to have made copies of it in order to circulate it in public; it was in his possession before it got published, he admits, but only after passing through several hands in whose custody it had remained for a longer duration.

The second point is an allegation, which promptly brings his suspects into the fore. He narrates the oral explanation of the event which he had already given to the then Chief Secretary for which he was threatened by him to not to put it in paper. His narrative makes Subramonia Pillay and S. Kumaraswamy possible suspects in the case. Further, he mentions the presence of several secretariat files as proof of the connection between S. Sivathanu Pillai, his son Subramonia Pillay and the Chief Secretary. His defence takes a forensic analysis of the judicial system by stating that he was not served with a copy of the Police report and that it was not legally just to deny him the right to give an explanation of the charges against him (2-5). It would be worthwhile to state his remarks which challenge the nature of the enquiry and the evidence accumulated against him:

If penal action affecting the entire official career of a Government servant were to be taken on the strength of mere police reports which are more often than not the products of hearsay information gathered during perfunctory private enquiry and of irresponsible information furnished by interested parties and manipulated according to the whims and caprices of individual police officers conducting the enquiry, there should absolutely be no security of Government service for your Highness's humble and loyal subjects.(5)

In his second petition dated 20/4/1935, Pillai adds a point that the then Chief Secretary had singled out his name though

there were other clerks in the department who had handled the file in its various stages of transmission. He writes:

“In this case, the Chief Secretary’s words were the gospel truth to the police officers. They would not dare to take another view different from that which was given to them by such an influential officer.” (13)

The rhetorical question, which is also an addition in the second petition, asks “How could a clerk like me take copies of the note in the house of the Chief Secretary where I was working right under his very nose” (13). This is quite interesting as it aims to highlight at once the innocence and sincerity of his character and the sheer impossibility of the crime even if it was for a moment supposed to have been committed by him. He admits the offence is grave but implies that the gravity of the crime should not punish an innocent (14). In this way, he does not question the punishment given to him but questions the mode in which such a punishment had come to be targeted on him. In both the petitions however, he has made references to his good reputation and morale as held by the superiors as well as his colleagues during his career (6, 14) and that under such circumstances he may be reinstated in the service.

The case unfolds on a new course with another petition emerging on the same issue. On 1/1/1933, one Bhoothalongom Pillai of Therur, Nagercoil sends a petition to the Diwan complaining about Bhagavathi Pillai, the clerk in the confidential section of sending a type written copy of an official matter and giving for publishing in the Travancore Times (C.S 1933, f 766, b 15) (See Appendix 10). The petition reveals that Bhagavathy Pillai’s dismissal from the service may have more than what meets the eye. The context of Nagercoil Municipal election is a distinct tapestry for the entire case. Bhoothalingam Pillai is shrewd to mention at the outset that he is in fact the first cousin of Mr. Sivathanu Pillai, the recently elected President of the Nagercoil Municipality so that he and his case may be well attended to as regards his stature. He makes use of the collective voice of the people to back his case ingeniously:

“You might have by this time come to know that the whole of South Trivandrum and the town of Trivandrum are now swollen with reliable information and belief that the Chief Secretary’s superintendent, Mr. Sankaranarayana Pillai and the secretary’s clerk Mr. Bhagavathi Pillai, who are Vellalas by caste and are natives of Nanjinad were taking undue interest in the election muddle against my cousin ...” (17)

Now the case is pitched as the public’s case, the demands, the public’s and therefore the solemn attention it seeks.

Bhoothalongam Pillai accuses Bhagavathy Pillai and the Chief Secretary’s superintendent Mr. Sankaranarayana Pillai of meddling unnecessarily in the election and having vested interests in getting the opposition candidate Mr. Nayanar elected. “I can prove if called upon it to do so...” writes Bhoothalongom Pillai quite vehemently saying that he, Bhagavathi Pillai has destroyed more than “twenty registered petitions” which Sivathanu Pillai had sent complaining of the latter’s malice besides the disclosure of official information (17). Bhoothalongom Pillai also resorted to speaking to the Chief Secretary in person but without any effect. Further, he mentions sending several representations to the Raja and the Police commissioner on precise dates (18). The petitioner repeatedly specifies that Bhagavathi Pillai and Sankaranarayana Pillai are both Vellalas by caste and belong to Nanjinad (17). This is not incidental but a reference deliberate and most cleverly used. The Vellalas were a community who originally settled in Madurai and Nanjinad and gradually moved in to Travancore upon the invitation of the Rajahs to take over jobs as accountants. They were generally thought to be clever and industrious¹⁴. The mention of the caste here is clearly to accentuate that both these clerks belonged to a migrant community, who are not natives of Travancore and hence had no rights over the Public Service in the State besides being generally cunning.

On 5th January 1933, the then Chief secretary sends Bhoothalongom’s petition to Sivathanu Pillai for report and remarks to which the latter writes back stating that the petition in question is invalid for he has no cousin named Bhoothalongom, and neither did he register any petition against Bhagavathi Pillai

nor does he intend to send any more of them (See Appendix 11). The said Bhagavathy Pillai according to him is honest and has been discharging his duty well and as regards his personal details, he knows not much. He asks the Diwan to dismiss the petition as “mischievous, [and] a black lie”, for to offer any more explanation to it will be “wretched” on his part and that it would do better to all of them not to bother about it (22-23).

It is important to understand the two petitions which form each other’s context and are absent presences in each. Bhagavathi Pillai’s accusations of the police report as being fabricated by mere hearsay can be read in connection with Bhoothalingom Pillai’s allegations in his petitions. To add a fourth angle to the case, there appears an anonymous petition from one “citizen”, who asks for the fair and just disposal of the same case in question accusing Bhagavathi Pillai of persistently and systematically being involved in such malicious activities (19) (See Appendix 12). The citizen seems to be privy to information that is not known to others enquiring the case (20). The citizen demands impartial enquiry, even suggests names to a committee to be instituted for the enquiry to save the innocent from dismissal and rescue the public service from corruption and high-handedness (20). This petition is neither dated, nor addressed to anyone. However, it is preserved in the archives quite against the government’s own policy¹⁵.

The four perspectives provide multiple memories contesting to be elected as the truth. They also reveal multiple facets to this interesting case. First of all, it portrays vividly the scene of a Municipality election in the State. The petition is a snapshot of the means of political vendetta and its nature of articulation. James Chirayinkandthu argues that elections in Travancore formed the contextual framework for the evolution of the representational politics which were marked by innovative changes. He describes the increasingly violent and turbulent atmospheres that each election of the State faced (647-658). He shows a similar case of election petition whereby in Malabar, the 1922 poll which had become thoroughly based on communal lines, saw a feverish battle amongst two groups in the catholic dominated Changanacherry-Minachil constituency. John Nidhiry of the *Jatiyaikya Sangham*

defeated his opponent K.I Joseph upon which the latter sent a petition to the Diwan alleging a foul play in the polls with the interference of the priests¹⁶ (654)

However, the case in question happens to be well after the election and hence it may be that the target was Bhagavathi Pillai who may be well be in the opposition camp than that of Sivathanu Pillai, or perhaps that his position as the Chief Secretary's clerk in charge of the confidential section is a matter of serious concern for some. And for either of the purpose, the narratives produced the pseudonymous identity of Bhoothalingom Pillai and an anonymous 'citizen'. The narratives of all these petitions are a rare mixture of fiction and facts; both are interspersed with precise dates, days and times of events and submission of papers and at the same time contains allegations which stem again from precise events and persons relating to it. For instance, the 'citizen' writes that he has ample proof of the persistent fraud of Bhagavathi Pillai that it may be verified by examining his co-clerk Mr. Krishna Pillai (19), at the same time Bhagavathy Pillai narrates his version testifying minute by minute where he was and the file in question was when it was supposedly handed out for publishing (3). Supposing Bhoothalingom Pillai's was a pseudonymous petition as confirmed by Sivathanu Pillai (22-23), one has to ask why such a pseudonymous petition was submitted in the first place. In Bhoothalingom's petition it is stated that he had sent several petitions regarding the misconduct of this clerk Bhagavathi Pillai but all in vain (22). This must have been a trigger to resort to a pseudonymous identity considering the general rule that anonymous petitions will not be attended to. A name, a place and a designation and a signature is all that it requires for an identity to be recognized. Thus, it is a cultural response to a nexus of changing social patterns and emerging bureaucratic tendencies. Forgery is the bureaucratic fall-out of a government that has its regime of truth anchored in a written accountability.

The offshoots of a realm of written accountability are further substantiated by Bhagavathi Pillai's arguments in defence against the allegations. The logic of his defence centres around the man-made law which prompts him to ask for a benefit of doubt, an opportunity to hear his side of the explanation, and above all his

point of a lack of substantial evidence to prove that the file was in his custody in that exact point of time when it was supposedly mishandled. His declaration of the police reports as “mere” and fabricated upon hearsay and a consequent filtering of opinions to suit their motives significantly points to the loopholes of the written word and its reliability. This remarkably points to the distinctly different era of witness, evidence, proof and truth that ascended with the advent of colonial regime. In medieval times, when the law of the Brahman prevailed, crime, punishment and disposal of justice revolved around a system called the *Satyapariksha*/ truth exams. This system was built on the social framework of the *jati-janmi sambradaayam* where crime and punishment varied wide and wild between the high caste and the low caste. Reading closely the history of this period would reveal that even ‘crime’ was a cultural contingent subjected to dominant interpretation. In such a system the power to testify and produce truth was restricted and entitled to the Brahmans alone¹⁷. Times changed and the divine/ the natural law of the ancient times was replaced by the man-made law based on Reason¹⁸.

Bhagavathi Pillai could now challenge even the Chief Secretary’s testimony against him, could question the police report on the nature of enquiry adopted by them and even accuse gentlemen who are higher in ranks than him of foul play and deceit. However, Bhagavathi Pillai, at the end of the day, was not re-instated in the service in spite of submitting petitions and memorials of his statements to the government. He is served a notice that the government is satisfied with the evidence before, that he did in fact commit the crime. His petition being rejected the officers in all the departments of the public service are served a notice from the office of the Resident, further to inform them that Bhagavathi Pillai’s re-instatement in any post is strictly prohibited (27–28). But as many critics have argued, the remnants of natural law prevailed most sarcastically in the man-made law which was built upon the basic premises of the natural justice itself¹⁹. Pramila Agrawal argues that “the reasonableness of natural justice is a result of the judiciary following the social conscience determined by the spirit of times” (291). Indeed, it was true to the social conscience of the time that the British

perpetually suspected the native sub-ordinates of corruption and dishonesty and that petitions served as a tool of espionage to them has been mentioned before; but that they used pseudonymous and anonymous petitions as reasonable evidence shows the inherent paradox in the administrative system they advocated.

Another point worth noting is that supposing if the ultimate target behind such petitioning is to remove Bhagavathi Pillai from office, then on a larger canvas of the social ambience of the time, it may be to promote a junior clerk to his post, and in that vacancy, employ a new person in waiting which might be the petitioner himself. This is suggested by Bhavani Raman in the context of nineteenth century Madras where the old scribes, who were chiefly the migrant Brahmins from the nearby states, who enjoyed the hereditary employment now began to be ousted as a result of a new system which was based on achievement and not on status, caste or family. They were most agitated and frustrated and more importantly jobless after enjoying years of prosperity. Thus, they began to write anonymous and pseudonymous petitions complaining about the misconduct of native officers and clerks to oust them from service and enter into service themselves in their vacancy (167-172). One could argue that a similar situation would have prompted these petitions also. By the 1920s, communal interests in representational politics had gained an exceptional stronghold regarding recruitments to the public service with each community gearing up for safeguarding its interests²⁰. Pseudonyms were used because their petition should be addressed and also because, in case of an enquiry the petitioner should not be targeted. In the premise of the cultural unemployment discussed before, this case further proof of the fact that the public service by the 1930's had made itself the most coveted and the most insecure occupation in Travancore.

It would help much to think about the case as a fractured point in the evolution of the public narrative as responses from within the system and towards the system. The petitions telescope further into the fracture offering a vivid picture of the different sets of identities that it created which contradict and co-exist in this particular fragment. Bhagavathi Pillai, by arguing on the lines of the lack of empirical evidence to support his crime at the

same time disapproves of the empiricism of the police reports. Bhoothalingom Pillai evolved first of all because of the precise nature of the colonial bureaucracy. It is interesting to note the use of the word ‘citizen’ by the petitioner. These identities narrate with absolute precision, their places, names and events distinctly and precisely but so does Bhagavathi Pillai. But the fact that the former is successful in their motive proves that the social conscience of the time indeed was one increasingly reliant on hearsay which stemmed from the paranoia of power²¹.

The petitions also point to the fact that from a Brahmanical homogeneity of testimony, the colonial administration threw open a realm where anybody could testify and suspect another’s testimony except that it should be backed by reasonable evidence. Therefore, forgery was not just limited to fabricating identities but one could actually forge reasonable evidence by just following a pattern of absolute precision and logical formulation. The facts regarding the case of Bhagavathi Pillai remain uncertain; the Government perhaps believes that the allegations are true but it cannot deny the possibility of its spuriousness otherwise too. On page 17 and 24 of the file can be found certain hasty scribbling by the Diwan. He writes “I do not believe this; the petitioner may be asked to produce proof...” (17) and later “C.S? [Chief Secretary] Was it not a definite charge framed?”(24). This shows that the government was left hanging in mid-air regarding the decision even if it was temporary, thus maintaining the axiom of the benefit of doubt. However, the Government’s decision to keep him dismissed is the final word on the case.

This brings us to the most significant point of re-circulation of knowledge. The British by accusing the natives as prone to the evil of “asiatick” corruption organized into a system of bureaucracy where they could control the production of truth and knowledge by instituting a regime of written accountability. But, contrary to this, the petitions generated in such fractures of cultural time and space became the axis of the production of truth and knowledge, thus re-circulating the movement of truth and information. Such re-configurations within the system breed and are at the same time bred by certain paper identities²² (in this case, ‘citizen’, Bhoothalingom Pillai and Bhagavathi Pillai)

5) Case of Lakshmi Ammal, Widow, Puthenchanthai, Trivandrum, 1942 (J 1947, f 1567) (See Appendix 13)

On 18th March 1942, Lakshmi Ammal, the widow of the late Mr. Chakrapani Aiyer, who retired as a District and Sessions Judge, sends a petition to the Diwan of Travancore praying that she may be conferred the pension of her husband so that she and her family may sustain their lives. The petition runs three pages long, the rhetoric most ornate with a flourish of excellent imagery. The narrative is well-detailed focusing on her ill-fate, her current misery and delivered in the most passionate words. One can easily identify a scribal mediation from the judicious construction of sentences and play of words. The opening sentence of the petition serves as the prologue to the entire petition:

“I am the most unfortunate and the anguished widow of the late lamented S. Chakrapani Aiyer, ... I beg most respectfully and with dutiful humility to present the following petition for your generous consideration.” (1)

These lines introduce the theme of the petition. Lakshmi Ammal's misfortune of having survived her husband, who was well lamented by her and her family, her position of being a respectful and dutiful citizen, a wife and now a widow will find intense repetition in the paragraphs that follow. “To a Hindu (Brahmin) woman, nothing is more desolating and poignant than to be condemned to survive her husband” is a powerful beginning to the entire narrative (1). This statement yokes beautifully the generality of a culture, the caste Hindu widow, whose marriage is an unbreakable bond of sanctity for seven lives as laid down by the sacred law maker Manu. Widowhood for her is partial death indeed. Throughout the petition she re-iterates her conduct as a loyal wife, who looked after her husband in his illness and lamented him well after his passing away and took care of his ailing mother and the children well. She interprets her husband's death as a God's trivia of snatching him away and refers to him as her “earthly lord and master” (1) and “her rock of refuge in this sea of innumerable sorrows” (3). By addressing the government as the “paternal Government”, coupled with her grievous loss of her

husband, her sole Lord Protector, her appeals to the Government sound like a stranded child to a father-figure.

The chief motifs of her narrative are her husband's diligent service to the Government, her own morale of being a loyal and dutiful wife, the dire financial condition of her family and of course the rhetorical acknowledgment of the Government's generosity and compassion. The petition is so well crafted, profusely describing her present state as acutely pathetic, helpless and a most unfortunate fate, that it is quite self-explanatory. At one point, she even apologizes for writing so elaborately her misery and "for inflicting this tale of grief" upon the reader (3). Her request is judicious, impeccable and modest for she would like the Government to confer her husband's rightful pension on her so that she and her family may live in a manner "just barely befitting [her] husband's status and circumstances" (3-5). This is quite a statement when read in the larger ambit of social space. Words like "condemned, unrelieved misery and torture, lingering pain, agonizing sorrow, protracted agony, [her] wretched self, mental distress, unrelieved gloom and melancholy brooding" are examples of the literary flourish and the impact it would have had on the reader (1-3). Thus, the leitmotif of the petition may be nailed down to her astounding attestation of her own morality both religious and sexual.

Being a widow demands a custom of representation and the petition exemplifies it best. The petition is received with immediate attention with the Diwan and the Resident scribbling on the file "This is a most deserving case. Refer F.S [Financial Secretary] at once" and "C.S [Chief Secretary] F.S? Can anything be done in this case?" (1). The Financial Secretary to the Government writes back saying that since her husband died after the expiry of sixteen months from his retirement,

no compassionate gratuity is admissible to his family. The rules do not also provide for the grant of any pension or gratuity to the widow and children in such cases. But compassionate allowances are granted by the Government in exceptionally deserving cases. In the circumstances of the case, it is for consideration whether a compassionate

allowance of Rs.15 per mensem may be granted to the applicant. (5)

That the regulation of sexual morality was engineered by the state becomes evident in the Chief Secretary's remarks where he writes that the said mensem may be given to the applicant "during good behaviour" (11) (See Appendix 14). Lakshmi Ammal is successful in getting a monthly compassionate allowance which can now be used for educating her children, marrying off her daughters and to maintain her economic status as was when her husband was alive.

Reading this petition in the light of the history of the cultural representation of Hindu widows would be illuminating. 'A Hindu, Brahmin widow' is as accurate as it can be. The caste Hindus were the last to accept social reforms because they were paranoid about losing their religious/communal ground in the phase of Missionary conversion. The name 'Lakshmi Ammal' suggests that she belongs to the Tamil Brahmin community. The Hindu, Brahmin widow has mostly been portrayed in literature as well as in the academia as the hapless pitiful creature who dies a social death most heinous. The petition would least disagree with this cultural image. It has to be mentioned here that the Hindu widow by virtue was seen chiefly in the caste Hindu communities especially the Namboodiris and the Tamil Brahmins. The other Hindu sub-castes like Nairs and Ezhavas had loose marital bonds traditionally.

Though the British investment in Victorian morality on the native culture introduced pervasive regulations of sexuality and morality the idea of remarriage would have been less impugning to them than the caste Hindus whose marriage was sacred and bound even after the earthly life. Thus, The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act or Act XV, of 26 July 1856, though entitled and sanctified the remarriage of widows, ceased their right to inherit their husband's property. Neither could they inherit the responsibility of their children. The act targeted in particular, the caste Hindu women, the child widows to be more specific, as none of other Hindu castes prevented remarriages nor entertained child marriages. Lucy Carroll quotes William Macnaghten's statement

in 1862, that “Second marriages, after the death of the husband first espoused, are wholly unknown to the Hindu Law; though in practice, among the inferior castes, nothing is so common” (78). But the law became an exception itself with very few women opting for remarriage.

There were a number of factors which deterred them from entering into new alliances. Firstly, the widow lost all her rights of inheritance on her previous husband’s property (80) and thus deprived of assets and finance, she often found it very difficult to provide for the dowry to enter into a new marriage. Secondly, but not any less significant was the social stigma which arrowed into a widow whose widowhood was the heroic. Even after a century the widow remarriages in the caste Hindu community were few²³. With the acceptance of the Malayali Memorial, the Tamil Brahmins began losing their inherited occupation in the public service and must have certainly showed a gradual tendency towards unemployment and thereby a financial instability (Subramaniam 1134-36). The women in the community also did not embrace education as readily as the other lower caste communities. Even Nairs encouraged the education of their women only by the second decade of the twentieth century fearing the monopoly/ domination of the lower castes in the Government service ²⁴. Most caste Hindu widows, especially those with young children never remarried. For fear of losing their children, they bore the burden of the household under dire situations.

Nita Verma Prasad (2013) argues that even in such circumstances, “there were important moments of resistance and action taken by women in North India, resistance that was surprisingly exercised through the colonial legal apparatus” (Para 3) which called into question the framework of the colonial state and the Anglo-Hindu law. Similarly, Prem Chowdhry’s work on women in Haryana chronicles how they contested issues of inheritance, marriage, chastity and sexuality sometimes by taking it to courts and otherwise by petitioning the colonial authority (86-88, 215-217). The given petition is interesting as it places itself within the established laws of inheritance, morality and chastity that surrounds a widow; her rendering of

her situation most passionately, a religious self-description and a representation most stereotypical and expected of a widow, earns her the certificate of an 'exceptionally' deserving situation speaks volumes of the irony. It is here that the petition becomes a subtle form of resistance disturbingly inconspicuous to the target of such a resistance.

The decade of 1939-49 shows several files relating to the grant of "compassionate gratuity" towards widows, mostly of men retired from government service (J1939, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49). The petition offers a protracted vision into the social and political contexts which initiated the production of such narratives and their implications on the contemporary structures of law and society. The fact that women targeted these compassionate allowances sponsored by the State, the very same structure which dictated terms of living to them, as their means of resistance is crucial. The compassion is engineered well within the terms of a sexual morality but the petition is able to subvert the colonial law to her favour. There are two points to note here- 1) petitioning one's life could be a form of resistance when the woman choses to remain a widow because of her bond with the children, to safeguard their interests and the family's economy. Here it becomes an exercise of free will and a way of exerting her own voice in the everyday struggle, which is most known to her. 2) The statistics of several women being granted compassionate gratuity also brings in an underlying possibility of the category of widow being entertained, perhaps sub-consciously, by the colonial law which ironically provided for the provision of widow remarriage. Both ways, it depicts a life-culture which was so formulaic of the time and space, that is least mapped by mainstream scholarship on widowhood and colonial law. It is one thing to study a reform and a totally different one to live it.

Lakshmi Ammal's petition demands from us a complex understanding of the colonial experience of widowhood in the bane of bureaucratic power, thereby exposing its limits and subversive potential. Lakshmi Ammal may or may not be the true reflection of what she represented in writing to the government, but the fact that she wrote down her present life, the factors

that decided her narrative and its reception open a new world of historicizing the present, a realm of narrative immediacy which at once mediated the everyday and the State, each entering the other and reframing one another.

- 6) Case of Punnakkal Kunchi, Vaikom, 1947 (J 1947, f 2993)
(See Appendix 15) On 2/11/1122 ME, Punnakkal Kunchi of Vaikom petitions the Diwan of Travancore

Praying for the pardon of offence committed by her son Padmanabhan accused in C.C 12/22 of the Division First Class Magistrates' Court, Kottayam. Her son, as Kunchi writes, is currently undergoing two years of rigorous imprisonment in the Central Jail, Trivandrum for a case relating to the 'Pattini Jatha' /hunger procession against the government. She is old, widowed and "on the wrong side of 62" (1), partially blind and taken over by illness besides ten other members of the family who are mostly children and are solely dependent on Padmanabhan and his meagre income. Moreover, her son is only the 10th defendant and not a continuous offender and her family is now devoid of any male member to protect them. She and her family being humble and the most loyal subjects of the Rajah, and on these circumstances, may her son may be excused on her behalf so that he may be able to look after her dying self and the children (1).

The petition is forwarded for remarks from a) The Superintendent, Central Prison (See Appendix 16), b) The Inspector General of Police (See Appendix 17) and c) The District Magistrate (See Appendix 18). The Superintendent writes in favour of the release of Padmanabhan "in view of the circumstances stated in the petition and of the fact that the prisoner himself has submitted a petition for clemency though rejected by Government" (7); that the petitioner's prayer may be granted on the ground, that her son expresses regret and the petitioner "executing an undertaking for [her son's] future good conduct." (7)

The Inspector General of Police remarks that Padmanabhan was convicted for taking part in an unlawful assembly leading to a procession and thereby violating the Governmental ban on

the same. He further points that the petitioner's son is "an active communist worker and may create trouble if he is released and hence on these grounds the petition may be rejected." (9). The District Magistrate also fears that the release of the petitioner's son poses an imminent threat to the government. He writes, "in view of the fact that Padmanabhan is a communist, I would recommend that the petitioner's prayer may be refused" (11). Thus, Kunchi's narrative did not return a favourable response but the initiative on her part and her narrative in itself is quite remarkable.

"On the wrong side of 62", an old ailing widow represents (the scribe's hand is acknowledged here) herself, her sorrow and her life's misery to the authorities and prays for pardon on behalf of her son and that her son may be excused and released. By the first decade of the twentieth century, communism had gained foothold in Kerala. Anti-governmental activities took the systematic form of communism and many a time was yoked with the freedom movement. It would do well to note here that the freedom movement in Travancore was deliberately mainstreamed into the national freedom struggle of the Indian National Congress. There were Congress supporters and adversaries who co-existed with the communists who accentuated indigenous reforms which aimed for a democratic, responsible government in Travancore. By early 1947, the hopes for a British-free India were high but the idea of Travancore giving up the linguistic union of Kerala and later joining the Indian republic was still debated. The year 1947 was for many reasons politically sensitive and an adverse one for the Government of Travancore because of the infamous reign of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer (Menon 129). This explains the paranoia about the release of a communist worker.

Taking a closer look at the petition, one can concede that Kunchi's *prima facie* aim was the release of her son from the prison. She employs her identity as a mother, an old and indisposed widow and lapses into narrating the 'pitiful' and 'sorrowful' world that she inhabits, which is a family of ten orphaned members, mostly children, as now they do not have any male member to support them. Another crucial point is the means of daily sustenance for

the family. Ten members depending on the meagre income of one man is quite a deprivation considering the literacy that the State had achieved during this time. Kunchi's life emerges from the margins of social change and her identity and life becomes a repository of evidence which is employed to contest the adverse effects of law on her. Kunchi attests her life before the law in order to re-claim it. Yet again the helpless, clueless feminine cloak of the narrative works as an unsettling camouflage of the attempt to resist the narratives of power. It would perhaps be the most anti-feministic mode of resistance in the general understanding of the term. However, to see it as a narrative which utilizes the state-sponsored apparatus of petition as a microscopic life culture, whereby she could insert her voice, humble as it may be, to contest the hegemony of social and political terms of life dictated to her, makes her narrative all the more poignant and bold.

- 7) Case of Savarimuthu Nadar Pakyanathan Nadar, Kappiyara Pakuthy, 1947 (Vernacular Petition) (J 1947, f 1171) (See Appendix 19)

In the month of Meenam (corresponding the English month February-March), in 1122 M.E, appears a petition from Savarimuthu Nadar Pakyanathan Nadar praying for an appointment with the Diwan in person. A rough translation of the petition in English is given below:

“Towards the sanctum of Maharaja Rajasree the Diwan of Travancore.

Presenting the sangadaharji (petition) of Savarimuthu Nadar Pakyanathan Nadar, Manjattu Kannadivila Puthan Veedu, Kulakkal Desam in Kappiyara Pakuthy.

In the grace of your Holy feet,

That I, who have had the fortune of prostrating before, to have had the opportunity of seeing your bright face and hearing the ever-smiling words that dwell on them, will be ever more fortunate to have your Holiness's grace on me again and that just the thought of the peace of mind I would get by meeting your grace has prolonged me from 22/2/1122 to this day.

Even though I have had the fortune of meeting your Holiness several times between 22/2/1122 to this day, our grievances and blessings have not been redressed in spite of your blessings. This causes acute self-reproach and grief that I have been living with the anxiety that suicide is the only way out.

Good or evil, your holy feet is our only refuge. And in this thought we have lived all these days. We have been ruminating on how our future would be and thinking about you all the time.

Sometimes, my humble soul does reassure that seeing you would not be in vain.

I may become a stranger to myself at the time of my meeting with you because of my misery. It is your duty to forgive all the words that come from me during this time.

There is a distance of 3 miles between the sanctum and my house.

As per the memorandum I sent to the sanctum on 22/2/1122, I therefore, humbly pray that you may bless us with the sight of your Holy eye.

Anticipating the visit to your sanctum on this day.

Meenam 1122

Petitioner [Signature]"

The petition seems to be from two persons, who submit their grievance jointly, probably brothers from the same family, but in the petition the singular pronoun 'me' and 'I' are used often (1).

At first look, the petition is a theatrical excess with a self-description that verges on obsession, narrating the vulnerable and dire mental condition of the petitioner. The narrative is most interesting as it contains potent cultural signifiers like 'Holy feet', 'sanctum', 'the third-eye', 'namaskarikkuka/ to prostrate before someone', 'dhyanam/meditate in prayer' and words like 'grace', 'blessings' and so on which yoke the ancient model of divinely ordained King with His Highness Marthanda Varma re-incarnated by virtue of the ritual of *trippadidanam* in the

eighteenth century²⁵. The entire narrative carries the mould of addressing a deity asking permission to worship him in order to have inner peace, and escape from one's sorrows; the spiritual aesthetic behind a temple, a church or a mosque being the same. He somehow prolonged his life all these days just at the thought of the peace of mind that he would be blessed with, on meeting the Diwan. He says that he had already got several chances to meet the Diwan, but his family's and his own grievances were not resolved and he is quick to add that the Diwan's grace was present throughout this period. It is in these circumstances that he wants to make an appointment again. There is a suggestion of suicide; that tensions within him have escalated to such an extent that it seems to be the only way out. Here is a subtle threat directed towards the authority. Subjects petitioned the rulers on the premises of a barter system of exchange of values; the subjects by petitioning affirmed the authority of the government over them and in turn the government was dutiful to protect the citizen.

He appeals to the Diwan to excuse whatever unprecedented behaviour that may erupt from him for he might become a stranger to himself and that the government may be obliged to forgive him in such a case. Finally, he concludes by saying that under his pitiful condition the Diwan, his Holiness, may look at him with the *trikkannu*/third eye. Third eye has mythological significance in Hinduism²⁶. It is also known as the eye of wisdom, a perception that transcends ordinary sight. The suggestion is quite clear as it would mean that the petitioner depends on the Diwan for spiritual advice and guidance elevating the nature of the authority.

Nowhere does he mention what he and his family are grieving unlike the other petitions where there was a clear aim behind petitioning. The psychological pangs and his mental distress is played out in words splendidly and this in turn becomes his grievance/ *sangadam*. In most of the other petitions, the grievance/ *sangadam* pertained to a definite material cause like financial assistance, taking favourable legal action towards a grievance presented etc. Here, the *sangadam* revives its lexical meaning of sadness or sorrow that affects the psychological

health of a person. The fact that he met the Diwan several times before without much relief to his woe and the present one again praying for another meeting with him is quite interesting. Savarimuthu Nadar Pakyanathan Nadar do not need recourse to legal action, nor do they need allowances from the government. Their grievance is literally their grievance, their mental grief. It engages in no form of resistance to the hegemonic power, but in fact seeks spiritual advice in order to resist the verisimilitudes of life.

Yet another possibility is that of narrating the actual cause of this grievance to the Diwan in person and hence his seeking the appointment with him. In such a case, the colonial fetish for the written word is subverted to the oral tradition of telling one's grievance to the ruler. The petition is sent to the Chief Secretary, marked as "urgent" (3). The final remark of the Chief Secretary is not enclosed in the file, so one cannot make any judgements on that. But the fact that the matter was received with a seriousness demanding urgency is quite a reflection on how the narrative excesses made an impact on the government.

It prompts one to problematize the concept of *sangadam*, how it culturally acquired different meanings - of grief and grievance²⁷. A ruling power would definitely prefer a grieving subject who would approach the rulers for major decision rather than a violently protesting subject who would take his own means to resolve his problems. This was one of the political sensibilities behind the right to petition.

Re-dressing the Quotidian: Petitions as Micro Life Cultures

An enquiry on the colonial petition definitely takes one to the vernacular history as to whether such forms existed prior to the Empire's rule, if yes, then what was its nature and what were the indigenous forms and norms of such a culture? A close look at the history of Travancore revealed that petitions in the form of *harjji* or *sangadaharjji* persisted reflecting the epistemic cultures 1 and their anxieties. If we may see the genre of petition via the paradigm of 'epistemic cultures', it enables us to see them

as cultural practices which sprang up at the bid of the needs and technologies of knowledge societies of a time.

As argued in section one, the colonial petition is not entirely a new mould but a palimpsest of the *sangadaharji*. Writing in itself was not a new formula for the British, but as Bhavani Raman rightly points out, the changing dispositions to writing made the backbone of colonial administration (7). The displacement of the native language with the foreign language was a significant change but vernacular petitions persisted well into the last leg of the colonial rule and they throw light on the cultural pasts of a petitioning culture much before the advent of the British. Therefore, the change in disposition to writing, as explained in section one, could have been sought by the peculiar demographics of carrying out a rule in two different time zones and spaces. It could also be a measure to discipline and streamline the colonized subject's response to the Empire as the British officials residing in Travancore were in turn reporting to the Queen's regime in Britain. Disciplining dissent was part of the Empire's civilizing agenda. This background knowledge is of absolute significance in order to understand the sphere and the pattern of response of a 'people' who resorted to the established system of communication with the rulers. So, the colonial petition does not institute a break, but rather a trail of continuity with the native forms of addressing the rulers even though the former was culturally, politically and socially written over the latter.

The petition from the representatives of the Latin Catholics reflects the evolution of collective petitions by the year 1947. The collective mode of petitioning required self-attestation with signature evolved from that of the early individual petitions which sought patrons for representation instead (as illustrated in the petition from the Missionary). The rhetoric, the tone of self-affirmation and giving not so-veiled pieces of threats suggest the imagined strength of a collective enterprise. Collective petitions need not detail the events and cause for the petition. The number of people who self-attest the petition is in itself a certificate for the content and the cause contrary to an individual petitioner who has to explain in detail his case, most appealingly, strikingly

and at the same time ever so politely. The representatives of the Latin Catholics sent a suggestion to the government that they would be helpless to ask the community to remain calm if there is no favour directed to them. It is important here to note that collective representations emerged from potential political centres on the people's front. In the late nineteenth century, the brief period of mass resistance through the mode of petition, the institutionalized method of dissent available then, was replaced by a political consciousness where collective petitions began to be deployed as warning signs indicating the imminent break out of a mass revolt or riot. One should also keep in mind that such a political gesture was possible and rendered effective only by 1910 where Travancore displayed high efficacy in mass mobilizations against the government in demand for sectarian interests. Thus, collective petitions in the twentieth century served as a discourse of parley between the native political centres and those of the colonial administration.

The focus of my study is individual petitions; the collective petition taken under analysis here serves to illustrate the different politics and discursive space with which both these modes are informed of and involved in. One significant point of interest in the individual petition is their precedence to the collective politics of mass petitioning. Of more importance is their persistence which found them a place till the last years of colonial rule. Even though the realm of individual petitioning was seemingly translating into a world of mass representations which became the first step in electoral politics, a group of people still committed to writing individual petitions; they resorted or had to resort to petitions in order to communicate themselves to the authorities. I argue that these individuals were people from the margins of social change and were precisely the casualties of social change; people whose crises in lives could otherwise not be represented collectively or say beings who struggled immensely through the fracture of a social change during a fragment of the cultural time. I believe petitions tap the fluid time and space of life in all its complexities.

The small group of recently converted Christians in the Venganoor parish struggled with a phase of an incomplete

translation into a new religion within the old social habitus. Their struggle narrates itself in the multifarious problems explained in the petition represented by the Missionary. The artifice of cultural unemployment faced by the educated youth of the Travancore and their mutual struggles and measures to confront this epistemic crisis throws open a limbo in the history of Travancore. It is an in-between moment pulled apart by two forces - the retrospective hangover of the past and the effort to hang on to the present. This writes itself in the case of Bhagavathy Amma, Ponnu Nadar and many such others of the time. Their efforts to secure a livelihood amidst this man-made cultural crisis by petitioning the government exposes the behind-the-scenes of the administrative machinery. It works like a hidden camera from outside the system but works with the same technology as the system.

To take it a step further, the world of paper reality and paper-identities created a cultural mirage which befuddled the juridical truth. The logic of the colonial administration saw petitions as their own area of surveillance over the native sub-ordinates in the public service. This shows that the “other side of the narcissistic power is the paranoia of power”². The petitioners exploited this paranoia of power and since anonymous petitions were never given importance, they produced pseudonymous identities because the government needed only names written in paper. This is well articulated in the case of Bhagavathy Pillai. Interestingly, even though Bhoothalingom Pillai seems to be recognized as a pseudonymous identity, Bhagavathy Pillai is still not given a favourable response. The same repeats with the identity of ‘citizen’. Without the colonial pre-requisite of a name, the petitioner was able to make an impact on the government. As Foucault would argue, knowledge is power, here, all the efforts of the government to be the centre of knowledge production is thwarted by the petitioners through the very same technologies of hegemonic power. There appeared narratives which blurred the pattern of truth circulation and contested the monopoly of the colonial government in its production. What interests me most is not only that these were narratives of response to the colonial law and narratives which resisted colonization quite inconspicuously

but that these petitions arrested a fleeting moment in the colonial present of Travancore by producing memories of lives lived, fabricated; identities real and imagined, reflecting micro-cultures that existed as a foil to the rule of the lettered city.

The case of Lakshmi Ammal is a typical life from the margins of social change. The caste Hindu widow neither embraced colonial modernity nor was she represented through a collective conscience. The reformative initiatives of the government remained abstract in law and files, but were not effectively translated into social reality for her. Here is a brilliant piece of narrative which writes widowhood, her life and misery aiming 'compassion' from the government. The form of petition and her passionate narrative is the only means available to her in order to restore her broken life and her family. It was a struggle for survival, a struggle to remake her life and a poignant resistance to the colonial law which stripped her off her rights and privileges. By presenting herself as the most chaste figure of feminine morality, by putting herself as the most typical and acknowledged figure of a Hindu widow, she makes for an "exceptional case" and a "most deserving" one, in front of the government. This is the beauty of subtle resistance, which often locates itself in the interstices of social law and everyday life. Lakshmi Ammal's life also drives home, the unconscious tendency of the colonial government to control widows socially, quite contrary to their initiatives to rehabilitate them legally.

Thus, petitioning one's life was the survival instinct, a strategy of choice to one's well-being. Similar is the case with Punnakkal Kunchi, an old widow, who begs pardon for her son by attesting her widowed, miserable condition. Both these women attempt to resist the life that colonial law had instituted for them by narrating their grief and trying earnestly to re-make their lives. They may or may not be successful in getting a favourable response to their needs but the fact that they remembered their life and themselves in such a fashion through the narrative of petition opens up a new socio-political discourse. Begging for mercy, for compassion by presenting oneself as the most hapless creature before authority might seem the most unappealing and the coward's way towards

one's end. But this study shows how they could be re-interpreted as the most latent form of resistance born within the elements of the system that they resist; hence they actually become subversive resistances challenging accepted notions. The Magistrate and the Chief Secretary of the Government had approved the appointment of C.K Krishna Pillai to the post of copyist. The case is noticed and forwarded for reports from the Magistrate. The discourse of individual petitions hardly carries the signature of human rights; they seem more in tune with that of survival narratives than a fight upfront for individual rights.

Our actions and reactions, our choice of methods are deeply influenced by the sphere of knowledge available to us in person. The ambit of personal knowledge to a caste Hindu woman/widow was very limited being alienated from modern education. J. Devika and Mini S. Kumar argue that the reform movements in Kerala, be it the political or the social reformation, side-lined women activists as mere tools to achieve goals and their contributions were never acknowledged (4471). The elite, enlightened women with Western-Christian ideas of womanhood put the less privileged women in "history's waiting room"³ for idealization and liberation. Both did nothing good for women's rights and welfare. In such circumstances, one cannot but appreciate the efforts of women like Kunchi, who in spite of their age, the social status of a widow and the obscurities of social change utilized the form of disciplined dissent available to them in order to remake their lives. She becomes a bricoleur⁴.

In the twentieth century Travancore, when the dominant logic for resistance had taken forms of mass assembly and collective representation⁵, such tendencies of producing parallel resistance narratives can be seen in all other petitions too. Derrida writes that these means are those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous—and so forth" (6). Thus, the colonial petition is a bricolage whereby a section of the people

articulated their everyday to produce life-cultures symptomatic of the colonial archive, their technologies of power and the social change. It can be observed from the given sampling of petitions that they all were produced from the margins of social change i.e., either casualties of social change or the refractive index of the same.

To put it more clearly, dominant methods of documenting a social change often resort to mapping the life of those who embrace the change and in turn change the way history and society turn tides with time. But those people who are left behind, either incapable of adopting the change or are left behind in waiting to catch hold of it, figure fewer and lesser in narratives of the past. It is one thing to know about a social change, an entirely different thing to live it and remarkably different to survive it. Petitions do more in apprehending the refractions of a social change than an actual reflection of it. Hence, I treat them as micro life cultures. These life-cultures articulated by the petitions convex into the tangential lives which punctuated a fractured moment in a broad cultural space.

Therefore, the parallel logical systems, or epistemic cultures that seem to exist simultaneously as seen through the petition narratives, seem to capture “time-knots”, a concept I borrow from Dipesh Chakravarty from his brilliant book *Provincializing Europe*. Chakravarty writes, “The two gestures, the two plural ways of being that make up our own present...the archives thus help bring to view the disjointed nature of any particular “now” one may inhabit, that is the function of subaltern pasts” (122). He clearly refers to the context of subaltern archives and their potential to throw light on our existential paradoxes. Using this reflection, I would like to see the form of petition as an inconspicuous form of resistance, producing an archive which exposes the inherent paradoxes of colonial administration technologies. It chronicled a parallel world of men and women who filed their lives for survival.

The form of subversive yet inconspicuous resistance the individual petition offers has been explained in section 2. If the low caste Christian converts of the Third wave conversion could

use the patron identity of a missionary to represent their needs in the nineteenth century, then similarly, as a gradually evolved response to the colonial systems of law, anyone could use the forged elite identity or an identity of some social significance in order to achieve his /her ends⁶. They evolved into alternate ways of entry from within the system and achieved a re- distribution of the hierarchies of juridical truth. These petitioners could effectively target the psychological vulnerability of the paranoia of power. The case of Savarimuthu Nadar Pakyanathan Nadar is a rarity as no such similar one could be identified in the archives. It challenges the very structure of the colonial petition itself. As explained in section 3, it helps us to problematize the concept of *sangadam* and its political significance in the context of petitionary culture. In the petition, grief and grievance converge. By the judicious disposition of the colonial apparatus of written accountability and communication the petitioner demands for an opportunity to meet the Diwan in person and render himself aurally. Grievance/*sangadam* has a compelling significance as it becomes the leitmotif of every narrative. Thus, we get numerous grief tales of resistance which generate peculiar identities and micro-lives of a fragmented time and space. The formula within these narratives prompts us to explore the distance between ‘grief’ and ‘grievance’ both of which translate to *sangadam* in Malayalam.

However, all the cases presented in this study drive home one point—the incapability of the colonial law to deal with the ground realities of the lives of ordinary people. These narratives of everyday crisis stand at odds with the dominant vociferous narratives of mass representational politics and violent riots and revolts in the twentieth century. Bhavani Raman writes, “from their moment of banishment into offices, files execute and administer, while law transcends and becomes abstract” (2). Similarly, on scanning the colonial archives, one can see how law increasingly becomes abstract, while files spring to life and live the day.

We live in time-knots. They constantly show us the disjointed present, regularly pulled by the tentacles of a past and the catapults of the present. From the samples taken for the study (arbitrary as they are), shows that colonial petitions telescoped

into the fragments of socio-cultural time and space, providing a cartography for tapping the nuances of a socio-cultural change, that came about with colonialism. It is a cartography which uses the keys of bureaucratic power, its elements and limits. It is also a map of the colonial present. As Bhabha argues that if the idea of despotism would regiment India's past, then the colonialist present needs some strategic calculations and recording in relation to its native subjects. This need, he continues, is addressed by the "vigorous demand for narrative" quite obviously applied through the ideologies of reason and progress (77). He quotes Derrida, which is worth re-quoting:

"an inquisitorial insistence, an order, a petition..., To demand the narrative of the other, to extort it from him like a secretless secret, something that they call the truth about what has taken place, "Tell us exactly what happened." (77).

Bhabha's analysis of the above statement is representative of the narcissistic authority of colonialism. Its demand to "address the Other directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfil its outlines, replete, indeed repeat its references and still its fractured gaze" (76) attests my argument of the nuanced mapping of cultural temporalities and contingent life-cultures. The genre of petition also initiates a discourse of narrative immediacy which arrests the particularities of the colonial present. By narrative immediacy, I refer to how the petition is a document which is produced in the impasse between the occurrence of an event and the actual outcome of it. There is hardly any scope for reflection or retrospection in them; it's the craft behind it which appears exceptional, complex and at the same time simple. The narrative of petition is the only other in the colonial archive, which speaks from the subject point of the public. All the other documents belong to a textual polity well within the bureaucracy, and this includes the native officers in the public service too. It dots a political documentary space which produced micro-life cultures that refracted the leeway of social change, embryonic forms of resistances and the inherent paradoxes of colonial bureaucracy.

To posit the individual petitions in the colonial regime as life narratives has two main reasons. First, because they document lives in crisis and tease out the tactics of everyday but are astoundingly brief, like a sketch. Such an approach puts into question the very idea of a complete, teleological life - a complete life which would document a person from his birth to death, or something that would chronicle events from his birth till a moment extremely prior to his writing it, or even better, some hundred to two hundred pages which focus on a particular event in a person's life as exemplified by the early autobiographies in Malayalam⁷.

It also challenges the eventful life, an immensely successful one, a famous or an infamous one - all of which seem to be the undeclared or unacknowledged canons of Life Writing.

The concept of sketch allows us to realize that more often than less, life slips and oozes into the in-between while we chase after packages and virgin spaces. Our life is a splendid hand-me-down of myriad memories and cultures; it is an inter-text. Such an understanding allows one to see fragmentary pulses of time and culture as life narratives. The brevity of the petition is in fact not its handicap, but a major marker/ signifier that beckons us to reconcile with the different sites and styles of memory that specific cultures may produce.

Secondly, I believe, these individual petitions that spread a platter of the everyday before us can be better appreciated from the standpoint of both literature and Life Writing. Attributing a literary value to these documents help us find meanings from the fine threads of signifiers present in them. Life Writing on the other hand is the only discipline which has a palette to absorb the colours, the patterns and the spectacle of everyday while history quite often creates dull, lack-lustre and fading portraits of such lives. Such a perspective not only adds a burst of colour to them, but also makes them animated so that they begin to speak to us. Thus Peter, Dolly, Kunchi, Bhagavathy Pillai, Ponnu Nadar or Lakshmi Ammal for that matter, become characters and not just people or colonial subjects; they become proper names to be reckoned with and not just figures in census sheets or surveys.

This does not underplay the historical value of petitions but rather complement them with another vantage point, from where things 'seem to be', rather than actually 'be'. This means that, the petitioners of the colonial regime are indeed colonial subjects, re-making their own life in the best possible way available to them, and in doing so, they provide historical snippets of the colonial past that cannot be accessible to mainstream history. But, it would do much more to appreciate the art of 'apparency' which is to understand the aesthetics that inform the 'play' and the 'craft' behind the production of such texts.

For instance, from this brief study it is clear how the petitioners outplayed the government with their narratives. A closer look at the case studies tells us that the identities that they played out- say, the widow, the dismissed clerk, the pseudonymous Bhoothalingom Pillai, anonymous 'citizen', the missionary or the outlaw's mother - all were identities that the government dictated to them or allowed them to be. It was impossible for them to produce an identity of their own and enter into the rigid structure of the State. The only string that connected all of them but at the same time attributed in some sense a difference was the grievance. All had some grievance and not all of them had the same. Authenticity was understood in a religious disposition to writing. This begs the inevitable question as to whether these petitioners had in fact a subject consciousness? A selfhood? A sense of authenticity? An awareness of identity? The inclination is towards a no than an affirmative yes. In my opinion, the discourse of individual petition offers a beautiful parody of some of the most familiar and cornerstone concepts of Life narratives such as 'identity', 'authenticity', 'the self' and the 'conscious subject'. Therefore, we have to understand the epistemic violence of seeking these concepts inside a narrative such as the petition. Concepts which inform the craft of such a discourse have to be identified in order to formulate theories to comprehend them.

Petitions may be better appreciated as a life practice more than life writing or a life narrative because the very idea of a petition is incomplete without its cultural and organizational signifiers. The

word ‘practice’ brings together the idea of a routine, a habit, and a system which the impression of a colonial petition is yoked with. They zoom into deserted alleys of colonial history and recount a tale of polite documents and political eccentricities.

Notes

Introduction

- 1) A phrase-speech layout is where the narrative appears in abrupt phrases, as is common in today’s systems of petitioning, where people submit their petitions through a prescribed form. This form is a filter which chisels out what the authority wants to hear from the petitioner and not what the petitioner would want to say.
- 2) The *International Review on Social History* in 2001 published its ninth supplement under the theme “Petitions in Social History”, which brought together a collection of brilliant essays which dared to explore the world of petitions in political geographies as wide as the nation state of France to that of the small state of Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. The titles of the essays and their respective authors are given below. See bibliography for the works of the rest of the authors

“Voices from Among the “Silent Masses”: Humble Petitions and Social Conflicts in Early Modern Central Europe” by Andreas Wiirgler.

“Supplications between Politics and Justice: The Northern and Central Italian States in the Early Modern Age” by Cecilia Nubola..

“The Power of Petitions: Women and the New Hampshire Provincial Government, 1695-1700” by Marcia Schmidt Blaine.

“Officially Solicited Petitions: The Cahiers de Doleances as a Historical Source” by Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff.

“Revolt, Testimony, Petition: Artisanal Protests in Colonial Andhra” by Potukuchi Swarnalatha.

“Deference and Defiance: The Changing Nature of Petitioning in British Naval Dockyards” by Ken Lunn and Ann Day.

“Petitions and the Social Context of Political Mobilization in the Revolution of 1848/49: A Microhistorical Actor-Centered Network Analysis” by Carola Lipp and Lothar Krempel.

“The Image of Jews in Byelorussia: Petitions as a Source for Popular Consciousness in the Early Twentieth Century” by Oleg G. Bukhovets.

“‘Begging the Sages of the Party-State’: Citizenship and Government in Transition in Nationalist China, 1927-1937” by Rebecca Nedostup and Liang Hong-ming.

“Private Matters: Family and Race and the Post-World-War-II Translation of ‘American’” by Nancy K. Ota.

- 3) While psychoanalysis changed the way of interpretation of a life narrative (as analytical case histories), Marxism which became most influential in the mid twentieth century, condemned auto/biographies maintaining them as propagating bourgeois ideologies and false consciousness when in reality it actually provided access to material to both historians and sociologists on class struggle. While Feminism rehabilitated Life Writing by reviving and producing women writings, Structuralism and Poststructuralism did not subscribe to the “tyranny” of the author figure and being paranoid of the fixation of meaning, constantly remained sceptical about the signifiers of such narratives. From Barthes to Foucault, the author figure travelled from a subjective space to that of a discursive space. Both pointed towards a way of reading texts without affiliating to the author. The diametrically opposite hermeneutics of New Critics and the New Historicists have polarized the possible approaches to the discipline of Life Writing and Life Writing studies diminished in the mid twentieth century.
- 4) A cognitive process is transferred metaphorically to the level of culture. See “Introduction”, *Cultural Memory Studies*.
- 5) The notion of ‘culture’ and ‘cultural’ here is rooted in the German tradition of the study of cultures (Kulturwissenschaft) and in anthropology, where culture is defined as a community’s specific way of life, led within its self-spun webs of meaning (cf. Geertz). See “Introduction” *Cultural Memory Studies* pg 4.
- 6) Poststructuralism and New Historicism.
- 7) A monumental work of seven volumes about the loci memoriae of France, entitled “Les Les Lieux de mémoire” (1984–92) Sites/ Realms of Memory. “A *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community. In other words, sites of memory are “where [cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself” These include places such as archives, museums, cathedrals, palaces, cemeteries, and memorials; concepts and practices such as commemorations, generations, mottos, and all rituals; objects such as inherited property, commemorative monuments, manuals, emblems, basic texts, and symbols.

- 8) *Modi-memorandi* is the compound term used for the modus-operandi of memory. See Introduction by Astrid Eryll to *Cultural Memory Studies* 2008 Pg 17.
- 9) The levels are chiefly individual and collective which can be distinguished only for analytical purposes.
- 10) The term is used in a sense to convey the idea that the entire world is a text and forms of life are present in every nook and corner. 'Text' makes the concept more comprehensive and accommodating that life writing or life narratives. I am indebted to Dr.G.S Jayasree, Head of the Department, Institute of English, University of Kerala, for this idea.

In Search of a...

- 1) Marthanda Varma in his death bed made a pact with his heirs that instructed them to keep the British East India Company an eternal ally, to support the foreign governance and accept the foreign presence without compromising much of the dynastic sovereignty and thus to save the hard-earned monarchic despotism in the land. See *The Ivory Throne*, Manu S. Pillai p18- 19.
- 2) Petitions as a layman's tool of protest and active participation in the administration has been suggested and studied meticulously by other scholars too, David Zaret is one worth mentioning. See "Petitions and the "Invention" of Public Opinion in the English Revolution" in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 101.6 (May, 1996).
- 3) The records given date back to 1554 and 1587- the former regarding a tussle between the Brahmins and Pillai's for the usurpation of a land by Ayyappa Perumal Pillai, rightfully owned by the Brahmin Keezhperoor Sri Marthandavarmaraya. The dispute escalated into a bloody fight, where Pillai's men ravished the Brahmin houses, injured and even killed people following which the Brahmins hung a cloth smeared with the blood of the victims in front of the Western *nadakkaavu*/pathway. The second one pertains to the burning of a house by certain people which involved violence.
- 4) Varier and Gurukkal argue that Kerala did not have any Kshatriya clans but was not short of myths and epics regarding those. There was a constant effort from the Swaroopams to manipulate the epics and myths to their advantage and project themselves as the descendants of one of those Kshatriya clans. Some even created stories in order to justify their legitimacy of power. Eg: Samoothiri of Calicut created a new Kshatriya clan/kulam called Agnikulam and claimed to be its proud descendant. For details see Raghava Varier's "Kolathunaadu Vazhakangal/The Customs of Kolathu Naadu" in *Keralolpatti*. Another method was the adoption of names(like

Varma) and assigning royal degrees like Vanchipala, Poonthurakkon and Kunnalathukon.

- 5) The idea of enquiring into the demographics of a region was suggested by Dr.P.K Rajasekharan , who works with the Malayalam Daily *Mathrubhumi*. Truly indebted to him for turning a new leaf into my study.
- 6) See *Keralacharithram* Vol 1 by Varier and Gurukkal.
- 7) *Harjī* is a Persian loan word. In most of the official records the term *Sangadabarjji*, where sangadam means grievance, is seen. Later, in the wake of twentieth century, the word *Nivedhanam* is seen in use.
- 8) The nine ways of worshipping the God is described profoundly in *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a traditional Hindu text (7.5.23).
- 9) See *Document Raj* by Bhavani Raman, (Chapter 1 &2).
- 10) See Bhavani Raman's *Document Raj*, Chapter 1.

Deciphering the Discourse...

- 1) R.N Jesudan's *Baliyadukalude Vamsbaavali*. Mendelbaum also comments that the hope of the backward castes for equal social status and economic betterment by conversion to Christianity was a hope rarely realized. See Mandelbaum, D. G. 1970. *Society in India*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. p 568-9.
- 2) The *jati-janmi sambradaaya* demanded a continuous supply of labour for daily sustenance. *Kulathozhil sambradaaya* is the system of family occupation which forbid a man to choose an occupation of his choice and made him oblige to employ himself in the work which was carried out in the family through ancestry. Thus, the *kulathozhil sambradaaya* was established which ensured the availability of labour in all sectors, at all times-be it for agriculture or skilled labour which included handicraft, carpentry, barber. The *kulathozhil sambradaaya* was nurtured by the *viruthi sambradaaya* by which a family which strictly followed its traditional occupation was allotted a *viruthi bhoomil* land. Any violation by any of the family members, who deviated from the family occupation, would result in the loss of this family land. For details see *Keralacharithram* Vol 2 by Varier and Gurukkal.
- 3) The nephews who inherited the property often mistreated the Uncle's sons and in turn generations after, the sons began to rebel against the unfair treatment and gradually against the system of inheritance. See Sreedhara Menon's *Keralasamskaram*, Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier's *Keralacharithram* Vol 2.

- 4) For a detailed history of the *Channar Lahala*, see Robert L. Hardgrave's *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, University of California Press 1969.
- 5) The link between subalternity and epistemic violence was first conceptualized by Spivak, but here I borrow an insight from Prof. Bini B.S, who promptly connects it to the historical context of *Channar Lahala*.
- 6) C. Kesavan, a prominent social reformer and the Chief Minister of Kerala in 1951, describes an incident in his Autobiography *Jeevitha Samaram* (1955), about how he gifted his wife a blouse but she refused to wear it. Later as he writes, his wife agreed to wear it inside the privacy of their bedroom but refused to wear it in public. For details see *Jeevitha Samaram* 3 ed. Kottayam: DC Books, 2003. 72-73.
- 7) The Europeans referred to Hindoos generally as heathens. Heathen refers to any person who does not belong to a widely held religion, especially a Christian, Jew or a Muslim. Since, in India, Hinduism was dominant, heathen became synonymous with Hindu/ Hindoo. The word heathen appears more often in the early correspondences; by the late nineteenth century, Europeans had delineated specificities of Nair, Ezhavas, etc. strictly into their official correspondences.
- 8) Bhavani Raman in *Document Raj* offers a deep-rooted study of how the natives were trained in English particularly to equip them for government jobs. English was by the second decade of the twentieth century the official language of bureaucracy and it was more or less ubiquitously imparted to people from all tiers of the society. For details see Bhavani Raman's *Document Raj* Chapters 1-3.
- 9) The study of how the nature and the attitudes towards the notion of work have changed from antiquity to the modern times has been investigated before. See *The History of Work Ethic* by Rodger B.Hill. There have been studies which discuss how culture affects unemployment. See *Does Culture Affect Unemployment: Evidence from Rostigraben*, by Beatrix Brugger and Rafael Lalive, IZA Discussion Paper 4283, July 2009. However, the phenomenon of cultural unemployment has not been discussed.
- 10) The British Raj was perpetually suspicious of the genuinity of the native sub-ordinates whom they appointed to assist them in the administration of a colonial State. From the numerous letters and official correspondences written by the officers of the Raj to their English counterparts, it can be found that their suspicion lay on the reason, they believed of an incurable asiatick corruption. As the word suggests, it is obviously pinning racial attributes

to the native's behaviour; a clear juxtaposition of racial subjectivities to sub-ordinate the native with an inferior morale and thereby justifying their civilizing rule over them. See *Document Raj*, Chapter 1, p 26-29.

- 11) The stem of this idea comes from Sunil P. Elayidam's illuminating thoughts and discussions on *jati* in Kerala. However, I differ from Elayidam's point of view that caste becomes a positive capital for the high caste and a negative capital for the low castes. True as it once was, we need to delineate the nature of the capital that is taken into consideration. Caste was once a cultural and political positive capital to the caste Hindus and later, the elite Hindu and Christian communities. But as society turned sweeping tides in the nineteenth century, and by the time it was the twentieth century, caste or community became the positive political capital for the backward sects while a negative one for the high caste. There is reason enough to believe that caste is still a positive cultural capital for the high-born. For details see "Crosscurrents Within: A Cultural Critique of Kerala Renaissance", a paper presented by Elayidam, in the seminar on 'Kerala: Towards New Horizons' organised by Jan Sanskriti, Delhi in connection with the Birth Centenary Celebrations of E.M.S. Namboodiripad on 21 Feb. 2009.
- 12) This petition is written with the third person pronoun of 'She' in it, indicating the distinctive presence of a scribal hand in its making. Perhaps it was the scribal influence which decided to omit the allegation previously written and focus on her imminent misery of managing a household with no income.
- 13) The usage is borrowed from from Angel Rama's book, *The Lettered City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, quoted in Bhavani Raman's *Document Raj*. It refers to how the Raj was obsessed with the aesthetic of writing; a technique they thought was the solution to manage the affairs of a colonial state.
- 14) They prevailed through the early years of the British era until perhaps the institution of the Malayali Memorial. They styled themselves "Pillai" as many of their Tamil Brethren in British India but soon they got naturalized in the Malayalee world that they dropped the "Pillai" in favour of the honorific "Nair". For more details see "The Vellalas of Nanjanad", Travancore State, India, C. Hayavadana Rao Anthropos, Bd. 10/11, H. 3./4. (May - Aug., 1915/1916), pp. 512-522.
- 15) In 1858 Madhav Rao prepared a set of rules for the submission of petitions to the Huzoor cutcherry. It was followed in 1890 by the Madras Presidency publishing a list of rule regarding the submission of petitions to be published in the Travancore Gazette. See Appendix. In both these files, the government seems to be intolerant about anonymous petitions; not only would they be disregarded but also destroyed. See Appendix.

- 16) For details see Report of the Election commissioners on the Election Petition of K.I Joseph, Legislative section File no. 83/1923, TGR; and *Travancore Law Journal* 24 (1934), pp 31-2.
- 17) Truth exams or *Satyapariksba* were in itself a punishment for the lower castes who had to undergo heinous punishment like dipping their hands in hot oil, walking through a burning charcoal, amputation of limbs etc while the high castes were subjected to mild forms of punishments. Even crime, as one would see contemporarily differed greatly in those times. For instance, theft, which was the most common crime in that period, had a totally different façade. It was nothing uncommon to forcefully abduct a *Channar* or a lower caste and forcefully enslave him, and if this be reported, the crime was not the brutality of enslaving a human but that of stealing a slave which was rightfully another landlord's property. For details see Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal's *Keralacharitham*, Vol.2 p 188-192.
- 18) 'Reason' here refers to the Enlightenment Reason of the eighteenth century in Europe which was disseminated into its colonies by the nineteenth century).
- 19) "See Indian Judiciary and Natural Justice" by Pramila Agrawal, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3/4, 1964: (JULY—SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER), pp. 282-291.
- 20) See "Electoral Politics and the Mobilization of Communal Groups in Travancore" by James Chiriyankandath, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Jul., 1993), pp. 643-665 Published by: Cambridge University Press.
- 21) This point will be revisited and discussed in detail in Part III.
- 22) The coinage is an offshoot of the word 'paperrelaity' and 'paper rule' mentioned by Bhavani Raman. The British government instituted a well-scripted bureaucracy which ushered in an episteme of the written word. This constituted a kind of 'paper reality' and in turn generated 'paper identities' through the mode of petitioning. See *Document Raj* by Bhavani Raman "Introduction" p2.
- 23) See *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader* edited by Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar. For further details see Geraldine Forbes's *Women in Modern India* (1999)
- 24) See *Keralacharitham* Vol 2, by Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal.
- 25) *Trippadidanam* was perhaps the most diplomatic drama ever played in the history of Kerala. By this ritual, the then King, His Highness Marthanda Varma offered his sword to the deity Padmanabha and rendered himself a *dasa*/servant of the Lord. By this gesture, he ensured the full support of the people without force as protesting against the God's servant would be to go against the God in effect.

- 26) The third eye is generally understood in Hindu mythology as Lord Shiva's third-eye. The eye which emits flames and burns things to ashes. It is believed that when the Lord is extremely angry, He opens His third eye and punishes the culprit. Many people assume that because of His destructive 'third eye', Lord Shiva is known as the destroyer. Shiva's third eye is also sometimes known as the eye of wisdom. The right and left eye represent His activities in the physical world while the third eye symbolises His spiritual wisdom and power.
- 27) A quick look at the dictionary tells us that grievance is synonymous with protest, resistance, to whine, moan and so on while grief means sorrow, angst, pain, misery etc. It shows how grievance became a cultural mould for resistance narratives and it is best articulated through the medium of petition. But in Malayalam, both grief and grievance translate to *sangadam*.

Re-dressing the Quotidian...

- 1) Karen Cetina studies how the sciences make knowledge and finds that each has different cultures of knowing and calls them 'epistemic cultures'. Epistemic cultures are shaped by affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence; they determine how we know what we know. See Karen Cetina's *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge*.
- 2) See Homi K. Bhabha on "Sly Civility".
- 3) Usage borrowed from Dipesh Chakravarty's *Provincializing Europe*. Chakravarty uses the phrase "history's waiting room" to metaphorically explain the idea of the British racial discrimination and their agenda of civilizing the barbarian. The British put the natives in history's waiting room, waiting to be civilized and then be written.
- 4) Word used in the Derridean sense. Bricoleur is a person who uses the "means at hand"; he utilizes the instruments at his disposition.
- 5) See Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala Samskaram*.
- 6) Sreedhara Menon, Bhavani Raman and many other scholars have consensus that early colonial petitioners were those who could pay a nominal fee in order to get their petitions registered and thereby considered by the government and therefore only the Elites could access the right of petition. The Christian converts however sought patronage of Missionaries to represent their voices and needs. But by the twentieth century, the fee was reduced and gradually replaced by stamp systems so that a wider spectrum of people could be accommodated. Bhavani Raman acknowledges the significant presence of anonymous and pseudonymous petitions in nineteenth century Madras, especially at times of heightened political tension and oppression by the native sub-ordinates and colonial representatives and that the British

entertained such narratives as systems of espionage for transparency of administration. See *Document Raj*, “Chapter 4: Addressing the Raj”.

- 7) Early autobiographies in Malayalam were mostly that of prominent political leaders. They became popular in the twentieth century with party politics gaining momentum in Kerala. They were written by eminent political figures and leaders justifying their political career, as memoirs to lay down one’s visions, to contest a public memory with individual memories etc. They became chronicles of history writing gradually, as they offered micro-reconstruction. Sometimes the entire narrative encapsulated the narrator’s memories and opinions of one particular event in the life, like that of the autobiography of Akkamma Cherian, the eminent congress activist and freedom fighter of the twentieth century. For details see *Jeevitham Oru Samaram: Akkamma Cherian’s Atmakadha/ Life, A Strike: The Autobiography of Akkamma Cherian*.

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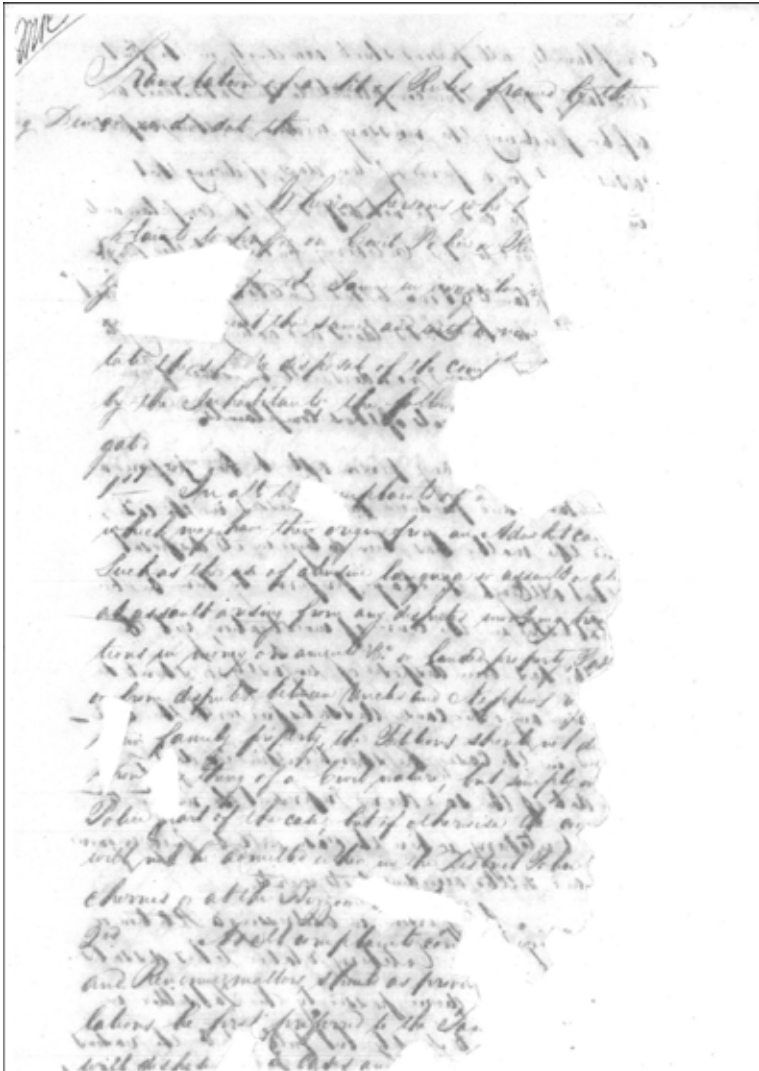
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APPENDIX

- 1) Copy of the Translation of a Set of Rules Framed by the Acting Diwan Sa/T Madhava Rao Regarding the Rules for Submitting Petitions, dated 1858.



are waiting for vacant employment as well as those
 who have been once discharged the same, but
 have since been able to find all vacancies can
 be provided with positions, that the names
 should be taken in the list of candidates of
 the respective Departments, when they are to be
 employed and as vacancies occur they will be pro-
 vided for. Such individuals are therefore prohi-
 bited from assembling themselves before the
 Catechery at the time that complaints are presented
 or making a proceeding with the Officers in
 the Catechery.

B^d All persons who submit their names
 will be dealt with according to the above.

(Sd) J. Marrow Row
 Acting Secy.

(A la translation)



6TH JANUARY 1890, No. 2, PUBLIC.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS
PUBLIC DEPARTMENT.

ORDER—dated 6th January 1890, No. 2, Public.

The following revised rules respecting petitions addressed to His Excellency the Governor in Council are issued, for general information and guidance. They will be communicated to all Heads of Departments, and published in three successive issues of the *Fort St. George Gazette*.—

MADRAS GOVERNMENT PETITION RULES.

BEFORE the submission and receipt of Petitions and other papers of the same class addressed to the Government of Fort St. George.

Persons having cause of complaint against any servant of Government, civil or military, shall, in the first instance, seek redress from the officer in whom the local authority is vested, who, if unable to grant the redress sought, shall pass an order in writing to that effect. If dissatisfied with this decision, the petitioner shall be at liberty to address the Board of Revenue or Court, or superior civil or military authority, by which the local authority is controlled; or he may address the Government, in cases wherein there is no intermediate authority.

2. The Government will not receive a petition on any matter, unless it shall appear that the petitioner has first applied to the local authority, and also to the Board of Revenue or other controlling authority, where such exists. The petitions addressed to such local and controlling authorities, or copies of them, and the answers or orders of those authorities respectively, if any shall have been passed, must be annexed to the petition addressed to Government.

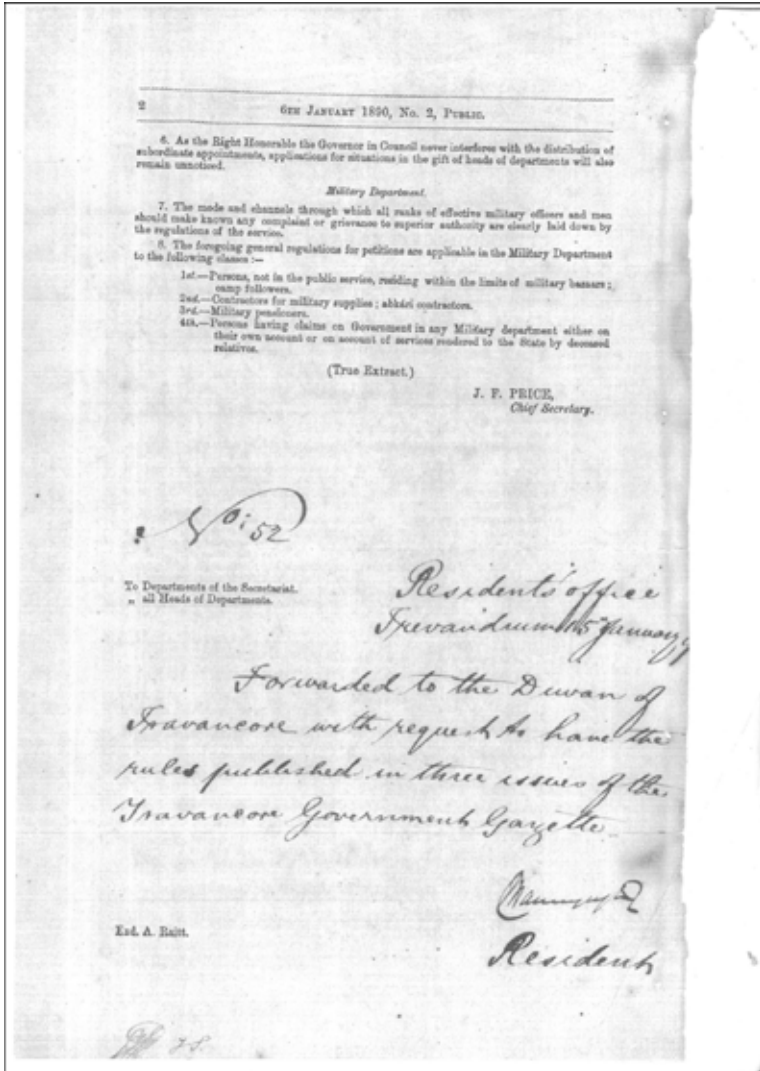
3. In order to enable Government to maintain the foregoing rule, without injustice or hardship to complaining parties, all heads of offices will understand that a party affected by an order is entitled to have, on application, a copy of the order, which should contain full details of the grounds of the decision. This is to be furnished to him, on plain paper, and without payment.

4. Government will receive petitions only from principals; addresses running in the name of a widow or agent will receive no attention. Anonymous petitions will be totally disregarded.

5. Petitions addressed to Government will be liable to summary rejection in the following cases—

- (1) when a petition is illegible or unintelligible;
- (2) when a petition contains language which, in the opinion of Government, is disloyal, disrespectful, or improper;
- (3) when a previous petition has been disposed of by the Madras Government, the Governor-General in Council, or the Secretary of State and the petition discloses no new facts or circumstances which afford grounds for a reconsideration of the case;
- (4) when a petition is an application for pecuniary assistance by a person manifestly possessing no claim;
- (5) when a petition is an appeal from a judicial decision, with which the executive has no legal power of interference;
- (6) when a petition is an appeal against a decision which by any law, or rule having the force of law, is declared to be final;
- (7) when a petition is an appeal in a case for which the law provides a different or specific remedy, or in regard to which the time limited by law for appeal has been exceeded;
- (8) when a petition is addressed by an officer still in the public service, and has reference to his prospective claim for pension, except as provided in article 295 of the Civil Service Regulations;
- (9) when a petition is an appeal against the non-exercise by Government of a discretionary function vested in it by law or rule.

2) Madras Government Petition Rules, dated 1890



Govt. of (1890) Madras.

PUBLIC.

Printed

at

Madras.

G.O., 6th January 1890, No. 2.

JANUARY.

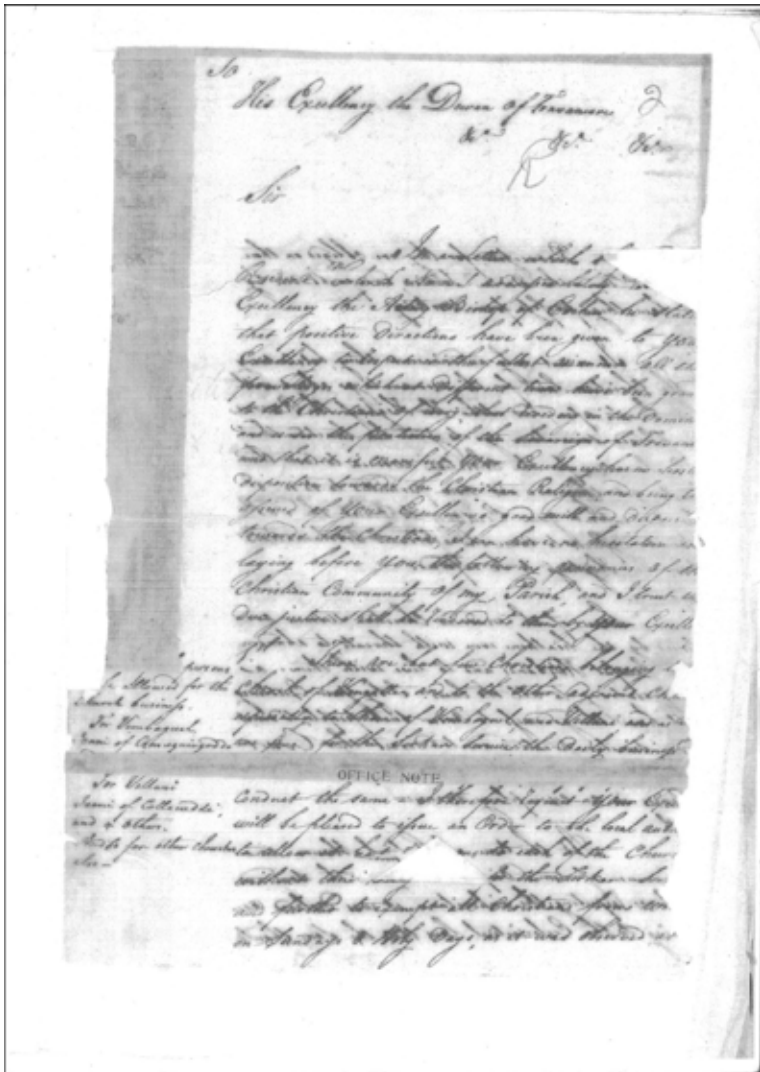
Petition Rules.

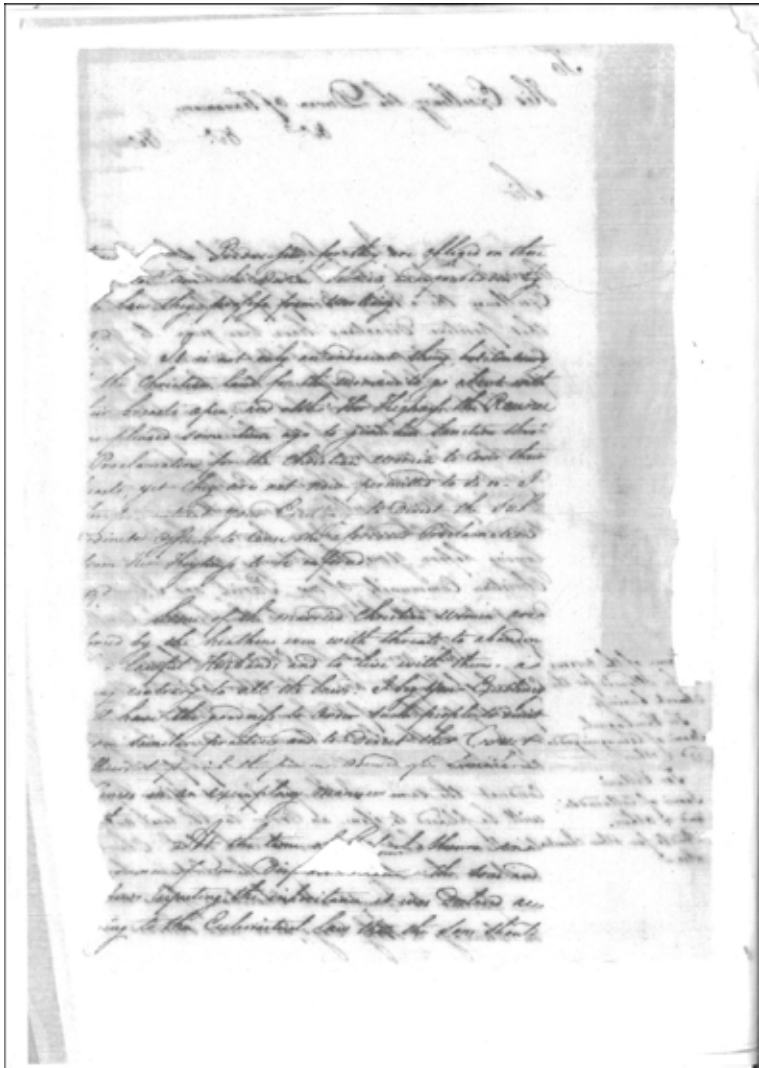
Notifying in the Fort St. George Gazette, and communicating to all Heads of Departments, revised rules regarding petitions addressed to the Madras Government.

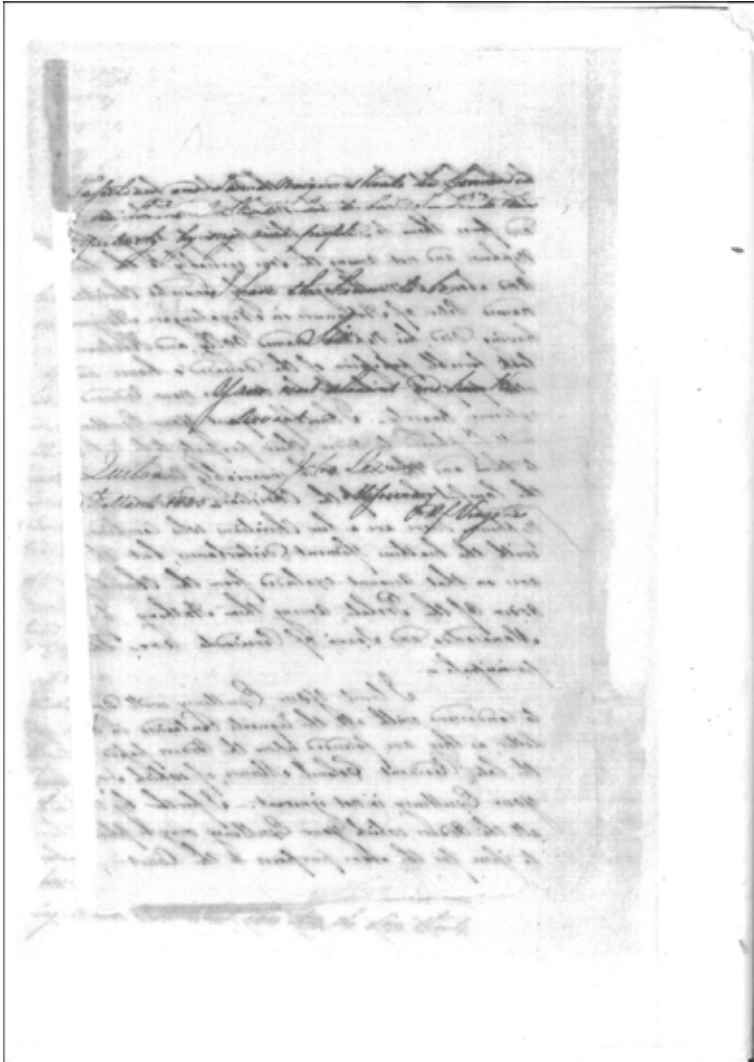
10/12/90
copy to
10/12/90

Forward for
action in the Gazette
The revised rules
regarding petitions
addressed to the Madras
Govt.
10/15/90
Mr. Paul
10/12/90

3) Petition from a Missionary, dated 1825







4) Letters of Correspondence between the Acting Bishop of Cochin and the Political Resident of Travancore dated 1829.

3

To
 The Most Rev. Fr. Manuel
 de S. Joaquin & Neves.
 Acting Bishop of Cochin.

Most Rev. Sir,

If you happen to have in your records a copy of any proclamation by any of the late Rajahs of Travancore allowing christian women converted from the Pagan fishing caste or Shanars, to wear a cloth over their breasts - or if a jacket (Coppoan) was ever allowed by the Rajah to be worn instead of a cloth by such women; an answer with such information as you may be able to give me on the above subject will oblige.

Travancore:
 6 Jan^r 1829.

I have the honor to be Sir
 Yours truly
 W. Morrison.
 Res^t

/ a true copy /
 W. M.

Colonel William Murray, C.B.
Political Resident at Travancore &
Cochin. 27 28 29

Sir

I have the honor to forward to you three copies of some notes of your Grace after Colonel John Murray, Acting as Governor of Travancore, regarding the matter of your letter of yesterday's date; but I was bound to inform you, that these notes were since cancelled by a Decree of His Majesty the Ruler of Travancore, in account of the conclusions caused by the said notes amongst the Nobles, and His Majesty's only intention the new concerted opinion of the Council & His Grace could be over their heads with private enjoyment; but not in the manner of the opinion of the Nobles, or a higher Court. I have not the copy of the Decree, but it was in fact the fact at the time viz. in the year 1843, and since that time the new concerted opinion of the Council, or the new Decree had not been allowed to cover their heads otherwise; and was this

were a good benefit to the said Christian Women,
because previously to that time they were not permit-
ted to cover their heads in any manner whatsoever.

They leave to inform you, that I had only
permitted with your said Pardon for Colonel Ash's
Orders to make the permission to the new converted
women to cover their heads in any manner what-
ever, according to the Christian decency; but in no
manner to offend the Privileges of the Superior
Caste; and as this end was obtained by the permission
of His Majesty, I have not since taken any notice
of the prohibition of some Christian Women who
pretend to cloth their women as to the manner of the
Superior Caste.

As to the manner of the foregoing, with those
was no question, as they were permitted to cover their
heads from ancient times, according to the custom of
that cast; nor the Natives excited any question
about them.

I finally beg your pardon for the error of
this letter, which was hastily written.

Delivered by
me on the 10th of
January 1789.

(is true copy)

I have the honor to be Sir
Yours To all the Hon. S. B. B. B. B.
Bishop of Calicut

5) Petition from the Representatives of Latin Catholics, dated 1947.

Petition dated the 18th July 1947 from Representatives of Latin Catholics to the Dewan of Travancore.

.....

The Latin Catholics have always been a loyal and law-abiding community. In times of strain for the Government during the days of political agitation, they have as a Community stood by the Government. It needs no illustration of specific instances to Your Excellency who has watched the conduct of individuals and communities in this State for the last decade. None has been more consistent in their support of the Government than the Latin Catholics. Every other prominent community has been divided either as a matter of policy for political bargaining or on account of sharp differences of opinion. But we as a Community have always stood by you and your Government.

As often happens in politics the diplomat wins while the unsophisticated, frank and sincere class go to the wall. It is a matter of grievance with the leading men of the community that all this steady and wholesale support given to the Government has not been appreciated by the Government. So there is a feeling of indifference and lack of enthusiasm among the rank and file in boldly facing the main political issues before the country now.

We believe Your Excellency will not misunderstand us when we say that this grievance of the Latin Catholics is legitimate and has therefore to be redressed.

The first and foremost grievance is about the public service. In the Revenue Department our representation among the Tahsildars and above is nil. Among the Magistracy too the same is the case. In the Secretariat, except one Secretary there is none worth mentioning. In the Excise and Education Departments too our representation in the higher grades is not worth mentioning.

While Communities who are not in any way better than we in hgt higher education have been treated with greater consideration and favour. Therefore it becomes all the more difficult for us to persuade the Community to join us in the loyal and law-abiding stand we have taken. Our is a community which can easily be satisfied as our ambitions are limited by the qualified heads available among us.

Still it is our firm belief that some of our leading and educated men will be found equal to any now in service from the other communities. We would humbly pray you to view us with sympathy and generosity and redress our grievances in the public service by some direct appointments in the higher grades of the Judiciary, the Magistracy, the Secretariat, the Education and the Excise Departments, and also by giving some Promotions to some of our men in the service, by changing the Departments or otherwise.

We humbly pray Your Excellency to do something substantial and appealing to the community at this time so that the community might shake of their sense of discouragement and rally round the Government. We can assure you that if only Your Excellency appoints a few of our educated men in the higher ranks of the service, the community is sure to feel encouraged and hopeful.

We assure you of our full support in the cause of the independence of our State you have so ably advocated. You can always count upon us as we too have counted on your patronage and still do pray for your sympathy and support.

5736/1947, No. 1127/47/Genl.

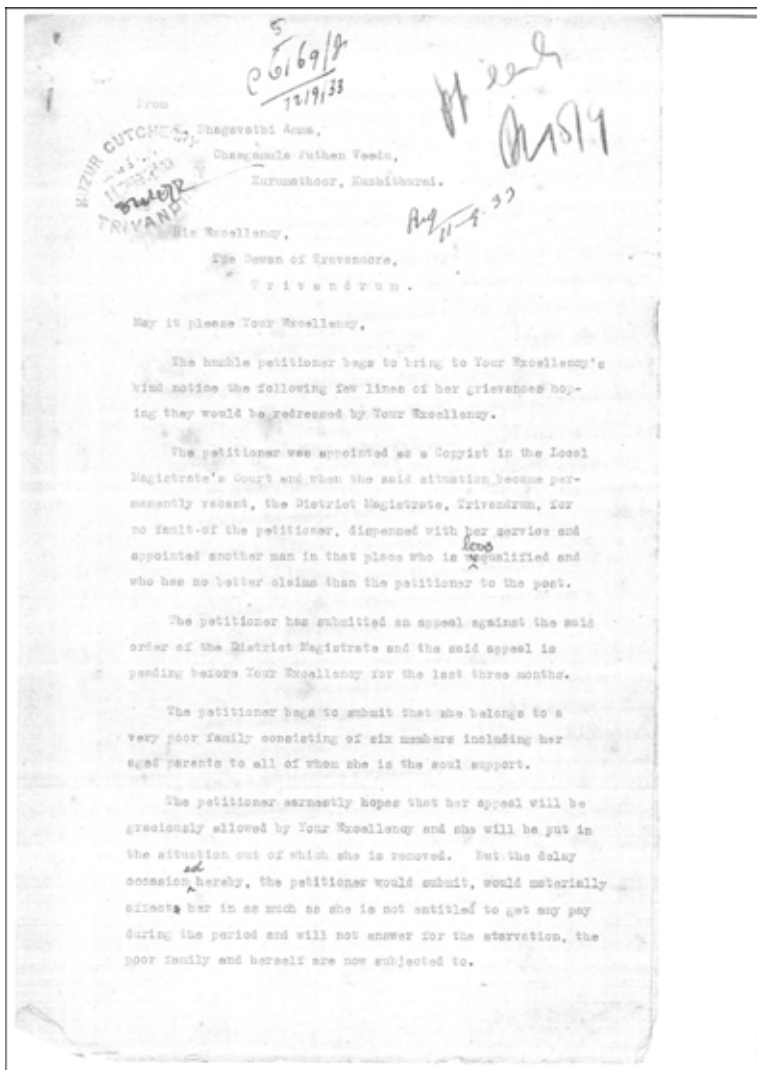
Basir Catocherry, Trivandrum, 12 Aug. 1947.

- Forwarded for necessary action:-
1. To the Account Section
2. The Revenue Section
3. The Development S. Section
4. The Judicial Section

Handwritten signature and date: 2-9-47

Asst. Secretary to Government.

6) Petition from Bhagavathi Amma, dated 1933



2

-- 2 --

Under the circumstances the petitioner humbly prays that Your Excellency may be so pleased as to dispose of her appeal at Your Excellency's earliest convenience and thereby ~~settle~~ *settle* the trained experience, the petitioner is having.

For which act of Charity and Justice the petitioner and her poor family will ever pray.

Kashithorel,
9-9-1933 .

I beg to remain,

May it please Your Excellency,
Your Excellency's most obedient servant,

H. Bhagavathi Amma

7) Petition from Ponnu Nadar, dated 1934.

25
C. 1672/ndd
6/3/34

From
Y. Ponnu Nadar,
Cheruvilal, Nalvay Desam,
Mattalam Taluk.

His Honour,
The Dewan of Travancore,
Trivandrum.

Honoured Sir,

I beg to submit the following appeal for an appointment for your Honour's kind consideration and necessary action.

I have acted as a copyist in the Kuthithur Second Class Magistrate's Court for about a month from 6th Chingam 1100.

I have submitted applications to the Dewan Feishkar Trivandrum on several occasions from the date of my passing the V.S.L.C., examination till to day begging for a job but I am sorry to inform your honour that I am left uncared.

The last application I have submitted to the Dewan Feishkar was on 4th Vrischadham. In 1100 the local Magistrate of Kuthithur appointed me as a copyist.

On 4th Kumbham 1100, I have known that a vacancy arisen in the Magistrate's Court and a certain Krishna Jilal was appointed on the post. I beg to add that Bhagavathi Amma has appealed that she is to be appointed in the post. But I beg to inform your Honour that I am the rightful heir to the post owing to my early service and qualification.

As for my qualifications I have passed the V.S.L.C., examination (Malayalam) in 1919, and the V.S.L.C., examination in 1926. I know Tamil also.

I belong to the unrepresented Hindu Nadar Community. I am 49 years old.

So I most humbly beg your Honour to be kind enough to establish my claim on the vacancy and appoint me in the post.

21
- 2 -
Hoping to be favoured with a reply. For which act of
kindness and charity I shall as in duty bound ever pray.

Belvelly,)
22-7-109.)

I beg to remain,

Honoured Sir,

Your Honour's most obedient servant,

V. Ramaiah

8) The Report of the Chief Secretary Regarding Bhagavathi Amma's and Ponnunadar's Petitions, dated 1934

37 5

5- The District Magistrate's report which is on pages 22 to 23 of current file may be perused. It is seen from it that Sri Krishna Pillai, whose confirmation as copyist is complained of by Sri K. Bhagavathi Amma, began to act as copyist in the Stationary Magistrate's Court, Kuzhithurai only on 30-7-1908 whereas Bhagavathi Amma's acting service as copyist commenced earlier on 8-6-1908. Further ~~XXXXXX~~ Bhagavathi Amma is a woman with higher examination qualification than Krishna Pillai. The only circumstance which is stated in justification of the earlier confirmation of Krishna Pillai is that before 1898 i.e. 11 years previously he had acted as Revenue copyist in the Padanabhapuram Divisional Catchery. The petitioner's statement that he had acted since as ~~XXXXXX~~ copyist in the Magistrate's court is said to be not verifiable from records. If, as stated, he was acting till August 1908 as teacher in the education Department, his claim for confirmation lay in that Department and not in the Magistrate's Court.

6- Though it is also reported that the petitioner Bhagavathi Amma ~~was~~ not the most senior among the acting copyists of the Division, that circumstance does not make Krishna Pillai, who was confirmed, in any way senior to her with prior claim for confirmation. It only shows that the claims of some more unfortunate acting hands have been superseded by this confirmation.

31

6

- 2 -

7 - It may be pointed out that it is seen from the report of the Stationary Magistrate, Kumbithurai, (vide page IV, current file) that both the acting appointments and the confirmation of Krishna Pillai were under the orders of the District Magistrate, Trivandrum. It is alleged in the petition that this Krishna Pillai is a near relation of the then District Magistrate, Trivandrum. The District Magistrate's report is silent about this allegation.

8 - In any case, it will be clear from the facts pointed out above that the confirmation of C.A. Krishna Pillai ordered by the District Magistrate was unfair and unjust as against the claims of petitioner Bhagavathi Amma and others senior to Krishna Pillai in the acting list of copyists.

9 - Beg orders.

10 - Ask the Dist. Magistrate to report the names of all those who are senior to Bhagavathi Amma in the order of seniority and the dates of commencement and the total periods of their acting services.

my
11-2-34

9) Petition from Bhagavathi Pillai, dated 1934

1/34 R. No. 4168
25-7-34

To

His Gracious Highness the MahaRaja of
Travancore, Trivandrum.

May it please your Gracious Highness,

With feelings of profound loyalty and devotion,
I beg leave to submit the following few lines regarding
my grievances for favour of your Highness's esteemed
commands:-

1. I had been a Lower Grade Clerk in the Secretariat from 1924 to the 4th January 1933. During my service extending over 8 years, I had not given the least occasion for any of my superior officers to administer even so much as a word of warning or reprimand in the conduct of my official work.

2. While I was thus discharging my duties, honestly, faithfully and efficiently, I was on the 29th December 1932, charged with having been responsible for the publication of certain extracts from the office note regarding the election of a President to the Nagercoil Municipality, in the "Travancore Times" dated 13-12-1932 and was directed to show cause why I should not be dismissed from service for the alleged offence.

3. Accordingly, I submitted my explanation (copy of which is submitted for ready reference) on 1-1-'33 protesting my innocence in the matter. It could be seen therefrom that the office file in question had passed through several hands before the date of publication of the matter in "The Travancore Times" dated 13-12-1932,

- 2 -

that it remained with some of the office staff for a much longer time than with me and that hence I alone could not be held responsible for the disclosure of the official information.

4. The explanations of a few of the clerks -- not all -- were obtained, but before the issue of final orders in the matter, my name was singled out by the then Chief Secretary Mr. E. George, to the commissioner of Police and the Police instead of conducting an impartial enquiry, cared only to frame vague charges against me. Meanwhile I was transferred to the English Records Section as a punishment. As this tended to cast a slur on my character, I tendered resignation of my post which was however not accepted.

5. On 6-1-1933, I was served with a copy of the Proceedings of the Chief Secretary to Government No. 1/33 C.S., dated 4-1-1933, dismissing me from service on a charge of having disclosed the official information in question.

6. From the Proceedings it could be seen that no grounds were set forth therein to warrant the drastic punishment meted out to me nor was any evidence in support of the definite charges levelled against me taken or discussed or even mentioned. It was merely stated that from the Police investigation in the matter, it was found out that typed copies of the extracts from the notes in question were circulated in Nagerecoil on the morning of Monday the 12th December 1932, that it was therefore clear that the notes must have been copied

- 3 -

out by me after the file was put into my hands for transmission to Bhaktivilas, that all circumstantial evidence pointed to my being the culprit and that I was therefore dismissed from service.

7. In regard to the above statements, I beg to offer the following explanations:-

(a) that the file in question was with me for a few minutes only, i.e., between 10.30 and 10.35 A.M. on Sunday 11-12-1932.

(b) that it was at Bhaktivilas between 10.45 A.M. on 11-12-1932 and 11 A.M. or so on 12-12-1932, that is nearly a full day.

(c) that it was in the Legislative Section from 12 Noon on 12-12-1932.

8. Besides I have personally explained to the then Chief Secretary Mr. K.George, the probable source of the leakage of information. When this oral explanation was submitted to him he grew wild and threatened me saying that he would damn me if I commit the same in paper. The oral explanation was as follows:

Orders were passed in the file in question by the Chief Secretary at about 8.30 A.M. on Sunday 11-12-1932 in the presence of Messrs. R.S.Subramonia Pillay Es. M.L.C. and S.Kumaraswamy, Proprietor of the Pioneer Motor Service. Shortly after finishing the files the Chief Secretary went to Church leaving the two gentlemen at Park View. Meanwhile they might have copied out the extracts from the notes in question, as they had perfect freedom in his house and the peons

- 4 -

were also at the beg and call of these gentlemen. It was only after I went to office at about 9.30 A.M. they left 'Park View'. I went direct to the Office Room down stairs and was engaged in my work. As soon as the Chief Secretary returned from church at about 10.30 A.M. he called me to his office room up-stairs and personally handed over the file to me with orders to send it immediately to Bhaktivilas. There were no office peons then either for packing the same or taking it to Bhaktivilas as all of them were engaged in house-work. Just then a peon from Bhaktivilas arrived with a message and the file in question was packed and sent through him. About five minutes time was hardly taken by me for the transmission of the file in question. Several Secretariat files such as the registry of Konandi Kulan Tank and correction of Patta in the name of one Mr.R.C. Sivathanu Pillai the father of Mr. R.S.Subramonia Pillai, bear testimony to the close intimacy between the then Chief Secretary Mr. K.George and the above gentlemen.

9. It could clearly be seen that before the matter was published in "The Travancore Times" on 13-12-'32 it was with me for a few minutes only and that it had passed through several hands, with some of whom it had remained for a longer period even to the extent of one full day. How then suspicion could converge on me alone, I have no means of knowing. With regard to the Police report relied on I have not unfortunately been apprised of what its contents were and what the sort of enquiry conducted. If penal action affecting the entire official

- 5 -

career of a Government servant were to be taken on the strength of mere police reports which are more often than not the products of hearsay information gathered during perfunctory private enquiry and of irresponsible information furnished by interested parties and manipulated according to the whims and caprices of individual Police officers conducting the enquiry, there could absolutely be no security of Government Service for your Highness's humble and loyal subjects. In the interests of Justice and fair play, I should naturally and legitimately have been furnished with a copy of the Police report and my specific explanation obtained in respect of each observation. In the absence of this procedure I was and still am entirely in the dark as to what proof had been adduced in support of the definite charge brought forward against me in the report. To act upon such reports with^{out} affording opportunities to disprove the statements would be very cruel indeed. Thus it will be seen that I was crucified for an offence not committed by me and not at all made out against me and that I was neither responsible nor concerned in the publication of the official information concerned.

10. It may, in this connection be kindly noted that I had been a clerk in the "Confidential Section" for over two years before my dismissal and that there had been no instance where I had abused the confidence, reposed in me or where I was in the least suspected of causing leakage of official information. On the other hand I had been discharging my duties in that capacity also to the entire satisfaction of my superiors.

- 8 -

I had submitted several memorials to the then
Down Mr. Austin, but nothing was yet done in the matter.
For the foregoing facts and circumstances, I pray that
your Gracious Highness may be pleased to sympathetically
consider my grievances and command my reinstatement in
service.

I beg to remain,

Trivandrum. }
24-7-1934. } May it please your Gracious Highness,
Your Highness's humble and loyal petitioner.

Bhagavathi Pillai

10) Petition from Bhoothalingom Pillai, dated 1933.

17

C.S. No 966

From
A. Bhoothalingom Pillai of Therur, Nagercoil,
Now residing at Chalai, Trivandrum.

To
The Dean of Travancore,
Trivandrum.

SIR,

I beg to take the liberty of placing the following facts for your earnest consideration and immediate orders:-

I may at the outset inform you that I am the first cousin of Mr. Sivathamm Pillai, recently elected President of the Nagercoil Municipality and as such I had been taking personal interest in the municipal election business for the last one month. You might have by this time come to know that the circles of South Travancore and the town of Trivandrum are now swollen with reliable information and belief that the Chief Secretary's Superintendent, Mr. Sankaranarayana Pillai and the Chief Secretary's Clerk Mr. Bhagavathi Pillai, who are Vellalas by caste and who natives of Namfined were taking undue interest in the election and were taking all sorts of measures to see that Mr. Sivanar was elected. My cousin knowing their attitude sent in more than Twenty registered petitions to the Chief Secretary praying that in the interests of justice and fair play they, particularly Mr. Bhagavathi Pillai, should be removed from the Chief Secretary's Confidential Section. I can prove if called upon to do so, that all these registered petitions were destroyed by Mr. Bhagavathi Pillai. This clerk further took a type-written copy of the opinions of the Head Cirkar Wakil, and the Chief Secretary on Sunday the 11th December 1932 and sent it to Nagercoil at 2 P.M. copies of which were circulated in the Nagercoil Town on Sunday evening. A true copy of it was published in the Travancore Times dated the 13th December 1932. I have given information of the mischievous acts of this clerk to the C.I.D. Inspectors Messrs. Subramaniam

C.S.
 P. Note.
 R.

I do not know
 as to whether
 any of these
 registered petitions
 were destroyed
 or not. I am
 sure that
 they were
 destroyed.

Handwritten mark: a vertical line with '6' and 'S' written next to it.

Sobramanfa Pillai and Bankara Pillai and have also addressed a letter stating these facts to the Commissioner of Police on 14-12-1932. Whether these acts of this clerk are with the knowledge or connivance of the Chief Secretary's Superintendent have to be enquired into and found out. My cousin personally explained to the Chief Secretary more than once about the conduct of this clerk in the course of last week. As the Chief Secretary did not take as yet any notice of the conduct of this clerk, my cousin and myself have submitted representations to His Highness the Maha Raja at the Cape on 24-12-32. My cousin is addressing a separate letter to you on the subject. I therefore pray that you may be pleased to order an immediate enquiry into the whole matter with a view to bring the real offender or offenders to book ~~as soon as possible~~.

I beg to remain, Sir,
Your most obedient servant.

A. S. Sankalingam Pillai

Chennai, Trivandrum,
1st January 1933.

11) Letter of Reply from Sivathanu Pillai to the Chief Secretary Regarding the Petition of Bhoothalingom Pillai, dated 1933

M. Sivathanu Pillai,
President, Municipal Council,
Nagercoil.

NAGERCOIL,
7th January 1933.

MY DEAR SIR,

In acknowledging your D.O. dated the 5th January 1933, I may state the following in reference to the statements and allegations contained in the copy of the petition purporting to have been sent to the Dewan by one A. Bhoothalingom Pillai of Therur.

The petition under reference is not only mischievous and scurrilous but also extremely damaging to my reputation.

There is no man as Bhoothalingom Pillai of Therur now residing at Chalai that I know of, and there is no such first cousin to me. So far as my knowledge goes, the Chief Secretary's Superintendent Mr. Sankaranarayana Pillai had given no occasion for any complaint and he was perfectly honest and true to his duty. I also know him to be a man of character and integrity of which I am really proud, coming as he does from my community.

As regards Bhagavathi Pillai, I do not know him closely and he is not a native of Manjina, but born and bred up at Trivandrum itself and so I can not say anything about him.

The allegation that I sent in registered petitions to the Chief Secretary to Government regarding the election is a black lie and if any such petition is sent at all over my name, it is clearly forgery.

With regard to the allegation of publication of the alleged notes of the Head Sirkar Yakkil and the Chief Secretary of the election file at Nagercoil on Sunday the 11th December 1933, it is incorrect; for if that be so, I would have known it at Trivandrum the same day itself. But I remained at Trivandrum till Monday evening 5.45 P.M. i.e., 12th December, when alone I got the information that the matter ^{had} gone to the Press Room and after which only I left Trivandrum for Nagercoil.

I may say in this connection, I had never been to the Chief Secretary afterwards till now, and to say that I saw the

Subscribed to the Dewan for forward
11.1.33
Amey

- 2 -

Chief Secretary in this connection, last week i.e., last week of December is another lie equally black. To cap all these, there is the grotesque statement that I made representations to His Highness The Maha Raja at Cape Comorin, which to describe is beyond me except to say is equally wretched. Lastly I have never in my mind ^{during} a proposal to send any letter to you as is alleged therein.

If I may venture any suggestion in this connection, it behoves all of us to treat with contempt any such paper and not to bother about it.

I remain,

My Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

M. Anantha Dhalai

To

K. George Esq., B.A.,
Chief Secretary to Government,
T r i v a n d r u m.

12) Anonymous Petition from one "CITIZEN" Regarding the Case of Bhagavathi Pillai, Undated.

19

Citizen who is in the know of things wishes to bring to your kind notice the circumstances under which the publication in the Travancore Times of the copy of the office note and the opinion recorded therein re: the Presidential election of the Nagarcoil Municipality for such action as the circumstances of the case warrant:-

One Bhagavathi Pillai, clerk in the Confidential Section of the General and Revenue Secretariat, with the connivance of Superintendent Mr. Subramanayam Pillai (a relative of his) is a particular friend of Messrs. R.S. Subramoisi Pillai M.L.C., and Kumaraswami Pillai, Proprietor of the Pioneer Motor Service. The latter gentlemen were helping the other candidate Mr. Kayalar in the election of the President of the Nagarcoil Municipality Council by making this Bhagavathi Pillai a tool in their hands.

The circumstances under which the above publication is made are briefly this. The Chief Secretary, after recording his opinion on the file handed over the file to Bhagavathi Pillai on the morning of Sunday the 11th December 1933 to be submitted to you for orders with the strict warning that it should be sent to you under seal and treated as "STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL". Before the paper was submitted to you, he took a typed copy of the Head Clerk Yakkil's opinion, the Secretary's opinion and the Chief Secretary's opinion and handed it over to the above M.L.C. who has, in his turn, handed over to another gentleman whose name is with the C.I.D. for publication. As the publication was made simultaneous with the receipt of the file in the V.J.T. Hall, it is self-evident that the information has leaked out from the Park View. Else, your orders would have also been published along with the other. Though the Chief Secretary was thoroughly convinced of the real truth, as citizen is reliably informed that some innocent men are now implicated and they are going to be severely dealt with for the fault of this Bhagavathi Pillai. This Bhagavathi Pillai was persistently and systematically doing this sort of business and that this fact can be verified on an examination of his co-clerk Mr. Krishna Pillai by instituting an impartial enquiry by a committee which I suggest should be constituted to enquire into the whole circumstances of the case

-2-

and bring the real culprit to book. Several registered petitions sent by Mr. Sivathasan Pillai against this Bhagavathi Pillai have not even been registered in the Confidential Section register and most of them have been destroyed while some of them are being kept by the Superintendent Mr. Sambarnarayana Pillai.

Though the Chief Secretary has given oral orders to the Commissioner of Police to make an enquiry into the matter, the Commissioner of Police has, as citizen understands, got written reports from C.I.D. Inspector Mr. Subramonia Pillai fixing up the responsibility of giving out a typed copy on this Bhagavathi Pillai. If, as suggested above, you are graciously pleased to appoint a committee consisting of Mr. N.S. Rama Pillai, the Palmanattampuram Division Assistant or the Trinmadras Dewas Peishkar himself, the Commissioner of Police and the Head Clerk Vakil, and if needs be Mr. Sivathasan Pillai, the elected President, and order for submitting a report within a fortnight, citizen is sure that everything will come to light and poor, innocent and honest men will be exonerated. May the citizen appeal to your wanted generosity and magnanimity to this mere and simple act of justice, equity and fair-play and save the poor and innocent men from dismissal from service and save the public service from corruption and high-handedness.

C I T I Z E N.

13) Petition from Lakshmi Ammal, dated 1942

1520

Cd 2875
Can ammal's case?

From *Lakshmi Ammal*

TV-3894
13-8-42

C 2602/42nd
20/3/42

Lakshmi Ammal,
Widow of late Mr. S. Chakrapani Iyer,
Retired District & Sessions Judge, 19
Puthenchandai, Trivandrum.

His Excellency the Dewan of Travancore.

May it please your Excellency,

I am the most unfortunate and anguished widow of the late lamented S. Chakrapani Iyer, retired District and Sessions Judge. I beg most respectfully and with dutiful humility, to present the following petition for your generous consideration.

To a Hindu (Brahmin) woman, nothing is more desolating and poignant than to be condemned to survive her husband. It has pleased God to snatch my husband - my earthly lord and master - away from me after a lingering and most painful period of illness. The last five years of my life have been years of unrelieved misery, torture and agonising sorrow. God gave me sufficient strength of body and mind to nurse my husband through this protracted agony of mental and physical ailment until death took him on Pangani last and left me heart-broken and helpless.

My honoured husband has left behind him an aged mother who has survived many sorrows to face this last and most grievous; five daughters one of whom has been given in marriage and another yet to be so; a son pursuing his studies in the Engineering College, Trivandrum; and my wretched self, holding on to life for the sake of the little ones looking to me for hope and subsistence.

I most humbly beg to state that my honoured husband was for some years a well-known advocate in Trivandrum till his appointment as Assistant Head Sirkar Wakil in 1103 and District and Sessions Judge in 1107. Sudden illness and partial (later complete) loss of eye sight compelled him in 1111 to avail himself of long, continuous leave part of it, on half-pay and the rest without allowance. Later, a

This is a new
petition case.
Consult 28
at all.
19/3
in
20/3/42
1107

paternal Government and your own generosity enabled him to secure a pension of Rs. But he was not destined to enjoy it long.

These five years of my husband's and our sufferings apart from acute mental distress of the most overwhelming nature, have involved us in heavy medical and other expenses which have consumed most of what he had saved. We have been subsisting on the pension so generously allowed. But six months after the orders regarding his pension were passed, my husband's illness grew worse. Years of unrelieved gloom, mental distress and melancholy brooding over his destiny unhinged his mind and he began to show symptoms of mental derangement. For nearly a year he was bed-ridden, unable to move and never in the full possession of his mind. Financially crippled already this critical period of his last illness cut deep into our resources; and his sudden demise on 3-8-16 has cut off his pension, our rock of refuge in this sea of insufferable sorrows.

Unfortunate and bereaved as I am, stricken and laid low with grief, I, the petitioner in all humility, and weighed down with the burden of a sorrow too big for such a weak one to bear, appeal to your merciful heart to consider the straitened circumstances of the family of my late honoured husband who served the King and the State in the most loyal manner to the best of his ability, of which none can be more aware than his poor desolate widow. Most humbly I crave your pardon for inflicting this tale of grief on you, in the hope that, God willing, you will out of your generosity, find it possible to confer a suitable pension on me, the widow of a most loyal servant of the State. Thereby the beneficent intentions of Government in conferring a pension on my husband (but which have now been cut off too soon as a result of his demise) may be given effect to; the children and I be enabled to maintain ourselves in a manner just barely befitting my husband's

status and circumstances.

Praying for your kind and favourable consideration
I present this petition.

I most humbly beg to remain,
May it please your Excellency,
Your Excellency's most obedient servant,

Trivandrum,
15 Mch 1942.

Handwritten notes:
No. 2106
27-2-42

Handwritten: Recommended to the Financial Secretary to Government for his favourable remarks.

Handwritten: A. S. Chackranian for Chief Secretary to Government

No. Fl. 2583 dated the 4 May 1942.

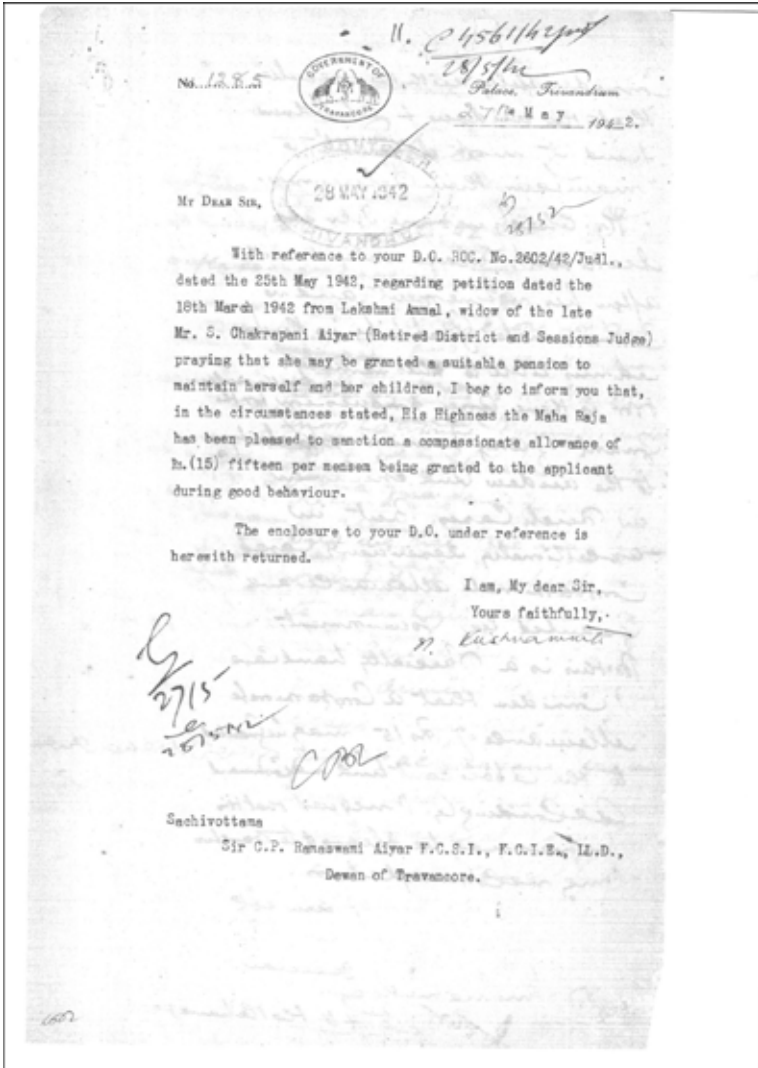
As Mr. Chackrapani Aiyar's death took place only after the expiry of 16 months since his retirement, no compassionate gratuity is admissible to his family. The rules do not also provide for the grant of any pension or gratuity to the widow and children in such cases. But compassionate allowances are granted by Government in exceptionally deserving cases. In the circumstances of the case it is for consideration whether a compassionate allowance of Rs.15 per mensem may be granted to the applicant.

A. S. Chackranian
Financial Secretary to Government.

Handwritten notes at bottom left:
6/15/42

Handwritten initials: P.T.

14) Correspondence from the Chief Secretary to the Financial Secretary Regarding Lakshmi Ammal's Case, dated 1942.



15) Petition from Punnakkal Kunchi, dated 1947

C6457/42/214
9256-49

3

Punnakkal Kunchi,
Padijattuvoorimal, Pottanadu,
T. S. I. K. S. C.

The Queen of Travancore,
Trivandrum.

Mr.

I most humbly beg to submit the following lines
for your kind consideration:-

My son, Padmanabhan, was convicted for 2 years S.I.
by the Kottayam District Magistrate on 2.1.1947. He is
now undergoing punishment in the Central Jail, Trivandrum. The
case relates to a "Pettit Jasta" and he, 10th Sept, is not a
habitual offender.

I am an old widow, on the wrong side of 60, and am now
half blind. Due to illness and the want of proper food and attention
I am in a disabled and most pitiable state. There are 10 other
members in my household, most of them being children below 10 years of
age. They were all depending on the small income, that Padmanabhan
was getting.

After he was convicted, since there is no other male
member, the family is now in a very sad and pitiable state.

We are all very loyal and homelike subjects of H.M.
The Nataraja and your Excellency's mercy alone can help us at this
time. I most humbly pray that Padmanabhan may be released and be
allowed to return to his old blind mother to see her health for
least in his presence, and to look after the helpless family of
small children, for which out of kindness I shall be ever grateful.

I beg to remain,
Sir,
Most obediently yours,
KUNCHI.

Valued. }
D-11-11001

16) The Superintendent's Remarks on Punnakkal Kunchi's Case, dated 1947

7

No. 6026/47 ^{C8110/47/2002} Central Prison Office,
Trivandrum, 30th July 1947.

From The Superintendent, Central Prison.

To The Registrar, Muzar Secretariat.

Sir,
With reference to Government letter D.C. No. 6457/47/Judl. dated 19-7-'47 forwarding for my remarks a copy of a petition from Punnakkal Kunchi, I have the honor to inform Government that the petitioner's son prisoner No. 8100 Muruganantharayan 10th secd. in C.C. No. 12 of 1122 on the file of the Division First Class Magistrate, Kottayam, is serving a term of imprisonment from 8-8-122. he is sentenced to undergo one year and 9 months R.I. and Rs. 200/- fine or 3 months R.I.

32
1-9-47
18
4

In view of the circumstances stated in the petition and of the fact that the prisoner himself has submitted a petition for clemency though rejected by Government (vide G.O. D.C. No. 2157/47/Judl. dated 9-5-'47), the petitioner's prayer for his son's release may be considered favourably on expressing regret and on executing an undertaking for his future good conduct.

Yours faithfully,
[Signature]
Superintendent.

m

17) The Inspector General's Remarks on Punnakkal Kunchi's Case, dated 1947

9

CONFIDENTIAL ²
Rec 47 (23) 5-B/gul/47 POLICE DEPARTMENT
Trivandrum, 22 Aug. 1947.

From The Inspector-General of Police

To The Registrar, Huzur Secretariat. *9180/43/47*

Sub: Petition from Punnakkal Kunchi, Padijettur-cherimel, Vatakka, Vaikom praying for pardon for the offence committed by her son Padsanabhan (accused in C.C.12/22 of Division let Class Magistrate's Court, Kottayam).

NE
23.8.47
Ref: G. O. ROC.No.6457/47/Judl. dated 19-7-47.

Sir, *W.S.*

The petitioner's son Padsanabhan was convicted under sections 56 of the D.T.R. and 135 T.F.C. and sentenced to undergo R.I. for one year and nine months and to pay a fine of Rs.200/- and in default to undergo R.I. for 3 months by the Division let Class Magistrate, Kottayam in C.C.No.12/22, for taking part in unlawful assembly and leading a procession at Vaikom on 29-7-46, in violation of the ban.

He is an active communist worker and may create trouble if he is released. The petitioner's prayer for releasing him after remitting the unexpired portion of the sentence does not deserve consideration and may be rejected.

Yours faithfully,
[Signature]
Inspector-General of Police.

ISN/22-8.

23

18) The District Magistrate's Remarks on Punnakkal Kunchi's Case, dated 1947.

11

9539/10/T-574

NO. 555/42
 DISTRICT MAGISTRATE'S COURT,
 KOTTAYAM.
 3-8-47
 18-1-23

To The District Magistrate, Kottayam.

To The Registrar, Mazur Secretariat, Trivandrum.

Subject: Petition dated 2-11-1946 from Punnakkal Kunchi on behalf of Padmanabhan 10th accused.

Reference: in G.O.No. 12 of 1946 on the file of the Division I Class Magistrate, Kottayam.

Six. G.O.R.O.C.No. 6457/47/Judl dated 19th July 1947.

With reference to the above, I have the honor to inform Government that the accused Padmanabhan referred to in the G.O. was convicted by the Division First Class Magistrate, Kottayam, in the above case on 2-5-1947 for offences under section 135 Y.P.C. and Rule 36 of the D.T.R. He was sentenced to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for 1 year & 9 months and to pay a fine of Rs.200/- and in default of payment of fine to undergo a further period of 3 months Rigorous Imprisonment. The case against the accused is that they formed themselves into an unlawful assembly and conducted a procession on 13-12-1946 in violation of Government notification NOC No. 2046/45 dated 10th June 1946.

It is reported that the accused Padmanabhan is a communist. It is also reported that the records of the case have been forwarded to the High Court for purposes of CrI.R.P.No. 498 to 504/22 on the file of the High Court.

In view of the fact that Padmanabhan is a communist, I would recommend that the petitioner's prayer may be refused.

Yours faithfully,
 M. Meera
 District Magistrate.

S. P. P. 1947. Case 19. 45890 12-1-47.

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