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Some Questions While Writing
a History of Trivandrum, ca 1800 – 1930

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# SPACES, BODIES, ABSENCES

## SOME QUESTIONS WHILE WRITING A HISTORY OF TRIVANDRUM, ca 1800 – 1930


**ABSTRACT**

Critical geographies and urban studies, has recast ways of studying towns and cities. This paper is on Trivandrum, and part of ongoing work on reading the history of Kerala through a lens of its different religious groups and claimants. This is an attempt to understand the ways in which towns and cities are produced as a relationship of bodies and spaces, marking differential claims, entitlements and erasures. The paper will also unpack the paradoxical ways in which the archive of the city determines both ways in which its history may be written, while containing significant absences that limit our understanding of histories of caste, labour or gender that are critical to a study of city formation.

# SPACES, BODIES, ABSENCES

## SOME QUESTIONS WHILE WRITING A HISTORY OF TRIVANDRUM, ca 1800 – 1930

**PART I**

Writing in the early 20th c, Isaac Henry Hacker[1] suggested that the reason the first LMS church in Kerala was built in Quilon (in 1820) and not in Trivandrum was because the Hindu, "and especially Brahman, influence was so strong that no permission could be obtained to settle so near the central pagoda…" He went on to add that after repeated attempts by different missionaries, finally a mission was opened in 1838 in Trivandrum, "because of the Resident General Fraser's influence."[2]

This paper is part of a larger, ongoing, work that attempts to study Kerala through a complex,

1. Henry Isaac Hacker, *A Hundred Years in Travancore, 1806 – 1906.* H.R. Allenson Limited, London, 1908 (read online on archive.org, https://archive.org/details/ahundredyearsin00hackgoog/page/n6/mode/2up), p.36.

2. Ibid.

and shifting, interplay of different religious traditions and forms of faith practice. As part of that research, which until now has focused on very different kinds of archives, I have looked at mnemohistories, 19th c. popular religious print material and visual and material cultural texts. The present research is an attempt to unpack more situated and lived histories, and reconstructing accounts of community lives in selected towns would be one way of doing this. The choice of Trivandrum as one of the cities to study is because, despite its lack of either maritime or significant mercantile presence, it has been prominent, from at least the 18th c. onwards, due to its being the seat of continuous political power. As this is just the beginning stages of this research, the paper is tentative and is more of an attempt to pose questions about ways to study this town, rather than to provide definitive answers about its history.[3]

Different scholars – from philosophers to geographers – have engaged with great subtlety with the distinctions between space and place. Here

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3. I wish to acknowledge here the contribution of three authors, Malayankil Gopalakrishnan, Achyuthsankar Nair, and Sharath Sundar Rajeev, all of whom have engaged continuously with trying to enliven different aspects of Trivandrum's history. While none of them is formally trained in the discipline of history, they have written extensively in newspapers and more recently on blogs and online sites. Malayankil Gopalakrishnan helped set up a remarkable web based archive on Kerala that has visual and textual sources (http://dutchinkerala.com/). Sharat Sundar Rajeev's insightful and beautifully written history of the ivory workers is a not merely an account of this exquisite craft, but also layered narrative about the changing history of a community that lived and worked in and around Trivandrum and its environs. Sharat Sunder Rajeev. *The King's Craftsmen: History of the Ivory Carvers of Thiruvananthapuram*. India: Kerala Council for Historical Research, 2016.

I shall simply examine a few examples to open up the diversity and possibilities these perspectives open up for this work. Michel de Certeau suggested, in a more abstract sense, that space is practiced place[4]. In other words, even though a building, be it a church, school or temple, may suggest a certain 'stability', de Certeau was much more interested in the ways in which its different, mobile, elements co-existed. If we work with this, a temple ceases to be just a building meant for a particular kind of worship but needs to be understood as the ways in which everyday practices "structure" it. For e.g., refusal to let menstruating women, or in an earlier period, supposedly 'polluting castes', enter a temple makes it a particular, exclusionary, kind of place. Yi-FuTuan, on the contrary, develops a form of thinking space that is tied to experience. As he says, " In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place".[5] He plays with a variety of ideas of experiencing, from bodily postures and the way in which these respond to circumambient space (e.g. bending to exit a doorway) to direct and intimate forms of knowing a place, as in knowing one's home intimately, as opposed to indirect knowing about the country). In other words, space and place do not make sense to Tuan outside the ways in which people experience these affectively. Here feminist geographer Doreen Massey's intervention, for whom spatiality was integral to her disciplinary training, provides important clues for conceptualising the relationship between space and place within a framework bringing together the temporal, social, and

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.* United Kingdom: University of California Press, 2011.

5. Tuan, Yi-Fu, Space and Place: *The Perspective of Experience, Minneapolis:* University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p.6.

the political. She does this by fracturing set notions about these ideas by introducing gender, or rather gender relations into the dyad of space-place[6]. She was interested in how social relations can be used to "define the spatial", and worked with the ways in which 'home' as a woman's place produces ideas of home/place itself as a source of "stability and reliability".[7] Conceptually, and affectively, this creates identities of 'woman' and 'home-place' as intimately tied together, and co-productive, which when applied to the economy, creates a gendered spatiality where women are linked to the home-place. This is not dissimilar from the concerns of Indian social theorists like MSS Pandian and Gopal Guru, who have examined the idea of space/place from the entry point of caste presence (whereas she used the vectors of gender and class), and how both presence and erasure co-constitute social and conceptual space. In an important intervention in this discussion, Guru argues, developing Lefebvre's idea of space, and creatively re-reading Ambedkar, that the idea of India as "Bahishkrut Bharat could be seen as a spatial configuration of the social".[8] In other words, conceptualising the spatial in highly hierarchical and divided societies demands a recognition of the deep social and economic fissures in society. In a radically different move, Pandian in his nuanced reading of Bama's *Karukku* and Gunasekara's *Vadu*, argues that these texts, especially Bama's, by

6. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p.2.

7. Ibid., 182, 265.

8. Gopal Guru, "Experience, Space, Justice" in Gopal Guru, Sundar Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory, Delhi:* Oxford University Press, 2012, pp, 71-106.

employing a "shroud of anonymity frees events, persons and places of their claim to distinctiveness."[9] In other words, this could be "anytime and anywhere". Such stasis is not empirical or descriptive; instead in Pandian's move this becomes a way to understand the manner by which the quotidian and the 'ordinary' frame the lives of Dalits. By delinking Dalit lives from the tyranny of spatio - temporal teleology, Pandian's reading makes the "commonplace" a mode of thinking life.

I draw upon these different insights while attempting to write about Trivandrum. Therefore, my interest here is to try and reconstruct histories that can rethink urban environments in relation to religious community, caste, gender relations and sexualities (in whichever way these are made available historically), forms of work, and living spaces. Alongside, I wish to think about the ways in which towns are also about inclusions and exclusions, and the kinds of historical traces that we can find for forms of living, that include modes of interaction between people and their environment. If the history of a town or city is about the people who live there, then how does one account for those who may not live within what might be understood as the town's limits? This would include not only those who pass through, and the immigrant, but those who might not have been permitted to live in certain areas even as their labour might have sustained the town. In other words how does one recreate an account that might speak to both material, and more affective questions about "belonging"- often associated with an idea of 'place' - even as one testifies to those who may have been denied such

9. MSS Pandian, "Writing Ordinary Lives", *Economic and Political Weekly,* September 20, 2008, pp, 34-40.

an existence? In part this is linked to historiography and the complex processes of marking presence – which is not merely, in this instance, about what we find from "sources", but also about who is not written about in the history of Trivandrum/Travancore. I would suggest that it is only by posing questions about absence and erasures that one can begin to recover that which is shadowy or elliptical.

Contemporary ideas about cities emphasize 'anonymity' – which is undoubtedly one aspect of experiencing a city in the present. But is this experience true across time? In the 19th c. towns appear to have had a clear sense of caste and religious markings, where spatializing is linked to inclusion and exclusion, residence and a more temporary form of presence (as in where those who passed through may have lived, eaten or the paths they would have traversed). In part, this would have been linked to, amongst others, sartorial practices, bodily marking (as in application of sandalwood paste or ash to the forehead, symbolizing attributes of both religion and caste), names, forms of labour, places of residence, and in closed localities, even kinship. Some of this is in evidence even in early ethnographic drawings and photographs, which even as they strove to identify and categorize, froze particular attributes of life with a view to suggest that the picture spoke for, simultaneously, time, place and person.

Colonial and missionary sources of the early 19th c. characterized Trivandrum as a "Brahmin town" – "Trevandrum…capital and seat of the Government…the Fort here encloses a Pagoda, Palace and an extensive Brahmin town…"[10]. In what might have been considered

[10] Lieutenants Ward and Conner, *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of*

as an early "Census" (even though the figures themselves ought to be treated with caution), these officials differentiated between Trivandrum district and town, and enumerated the numbers of "principle temples dedicated to superior divinities" (81 in the district and 51 in the town); those dedicated to minor ones (53 in the district; 49 in town); places of worship belonging to "inferior castes" (35 in the district and 12 in the town); Christian churches of all descriptions (12 in the district and 11 in the town); and "Mahomedan places of worship" (8 in the district and town). The early colonial and missionary accounts, and the slightly later accounts of local, upper caste, officials (be it Nagam Aiya or T. K. Velu Pillai) offer a rather different reading of the same space, in that while the former are far more attentive to caste power and its excesses, the latter almost skate over this, and provide a more monarchical account. This paper (and research) isn't a tracking of the monarchical modern – on the contrary it is an attempt to see how we can understand the changing history of a town's space that is co-constituted by different religious communities and castes, and how that would influence the ways in which we read their relationship to their built environment.

By 1901, Census enumeration, with all its infelicities, suggests that Trivandrum acquired the status of a municipality as it had 57, 882 inhabitants. This was twice that of Kottayam, the next largest town, and had more than twice the population of Nagercoil. One of the requirements by the office of the Census to define a place as a town was that it needed a "continuous collection of houses" that was "permanently

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*the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States,* Thiruvananthapuram: Reprinted by Government of Kerala, 1994, 48.

inhabited by not less than 5000 persons, and possessed of an urban character." While it is unclear what was understood as "urban" at that time, it is likely that this was linked to what was described as being a "centre of trade" and "historic associations."[11]. It is also striking that N. Subrahmanya Aiyar, the author of the 1901 census report, describes Trivandrum in glowing terms, "The Fort and its neighbourhood constitute the most crowded part of Town and here, amongst the people, lives the Ruler of this ancient country…" [12]. What isn't mentioned by Aiyar of course is that "the people" here are the Brahmins, who, as Hacker observed at almost the same time, did not allow anyone else to settle inside the Fort. VKK Valath who wrote a history of Trivandrum by a creative reading of place names and their etymologies, suggests that what is now known as *puttharikandam maidanam* was named thus as the Pulaya rice cultivators of paddy lands were required by the temple and royals to donate rice from their first harvests to the temple.[13]By 1912, the population in Trivandrum had increased by 9.8%, despite outbreaks of cholera and smallpox between 1908-1911[14]. Despite his observation that the Fort area had a higher density of population than other parts and that the lanes were narrow and packed, Aiyar seemed to feel that

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11. N. Subrahmanya Aiyar, *Census of India: Travancore*, 1901, Vol: 26, pp 19-20.

12. Ibid., p. 22.

13. VVK Valath, *Keralathile Sthalacharitrangal: Thiruvananthapuram Jilla* [Kerala's Place Histories: Thiruvananthapuram District], Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1998, 38-9.

14. N Subrahmanya Aiyar, *Census of India,* 1911, Part 1, Report, Travancore, Vol: XXIII, p. 34.

the increase in building would "take care of the population," and that Trivandrum benefited from "municipal efficiency"[15]. I shall return to this issue in the second part of the paper.

In terms of just numbers, by 1911 while there were 7,693 Hindus per 10,000 of the population in Trivandrum, when proportionately the Christians were 1386 and the Muslims (variously referred to as Musalmans or Mahomedans), 918. However, it is from the accounts of the 19th c Protestant missionaries that one begins to get a very different picture of the town, despite its much touted attributes that are usually perceived to be the consequences of a benign, and developmentalist, monarchical modernity. Writing in 1871, Samuel Mateer observes about the Fort walls that they had "no strength as a defence. Its only value to the Brahmans and high castes who reside inside the Fort is to prevent the ingress of persons of low caste, the gates being carefully guarded by Sepoys, and no low caste people allowed to pass." Well over two decades before Mateer made these observations, another missionary, Rev. John Cox had fired off impassioned letters to the Government of Madras, protesting about the "persecution of new converts, especially when they increased in the neighbourhood of the capital…"[16] These letters were written between 1855-57, even though he had been in Travancore since 1838 as a missionary. According to his letters, the "persecution" had increased because of the then Dewan, one Krishna Row, who not only mismanaged the kingdom, but was also cruel in a

15. Ibid., p.38.

16. Rev. John Cox, *Travancore, Its Present Ruin Shown, and Remedy Sought,* iii, online, e-book, Google, accessed 06/02/20.

targeted fashion. The forms of excesses reported by Cox are familiar. Perhaps what is more significant is that they bear testimony to a certain modernity of institutional violence. In the introduction to his letters he writes, "But now, oppressions and extortions of the grossest kind, and torture so severe that life is periled thereby, are commonly practiced… [the] oppressed may be marked for deeper oppression…temporary imprisonment be commuted into continued illegal incarceration…and assault become aggravated by torture…"[17]. The new converts who were attacked and tortured, resulting at least in one case of death, were in all likelihood Pulaya, or Shanar, converts.

Three petitions that are appended with Cox's letters are revealing. In one case, the widow of a man killed due to torture, speaks of a group of people, including a Pillai, a Shanan and some "Nulliar", who came to their area on the outskirts of "Trevandrum" ("Kundamumbagum, Vellapu Athicarum") demanding that they deliver supplies to the palace in "Trevandrum" without any payment, and also work on the plantations without wages. Daivasahayam, along with seven others from whom such forced labour was being demanded by the "muthalpidicaran", refused to work without pay. They were then dragged off to the "Rajah's Fort at Trevandrum", and in a place near "Karupucoil", tortured very badly. After this they were taken away and kept in the "Tanah" for six days, with their legs in stocks.[18] Other than the gruesome details of violence and torture in each of the petitions (Petition C, speaks of

17. ibid., p.2

18. ibid., p.13.

someone urinating in the Petitioner, Thomas Paul's mouth)[19] it is also significant to note that the social location of each of the petitioners was very different. While Daivasahayam was just a poor labourer, Joseph, had become a schoolmaster and worked under Rev. Cox at a school in Naimum that was run by Cox[20]. However, the threat represented by the conversions of lower castes, especially Pulayas, to Christianity was such that the attack on Joseph at the Neimum school was led by the Athikari, Matharen Pilley himself. It was around this time that, as Hacker and Nagam Aiya were to write about later, chapels and schools were burnt in not so far away Parashala, Neyyoor and Nagercoil.[21]The labour contractors and adhikaris mentioned by name were all one of the Nair subcastes (Pillay), which offers a different way of reading histories of labour and violence, which in turn folded in differences of caste and religion. In addition, from Daivasahayam's petition we also get to know that there was, by then, a 'tanah' or jail, inside the Fort.

While 19th c. town descriptions may often seem too general and imprecise, what is of interest from these LMS missionary texts is a sense of not simply caste excesses and atrocities, but also conversion struggles, some forms of labour and also a sense of where different, especially the lower castes, lived. Even though by 1901 the Census Report reports proudly that "[T]he Military Cantonment, the Government offices and other public buildings, the residences of the upper classes, European as

19. ibid., p.14.

20. ibid., p.13.

21. Hacker, *A Hundred Years,* p. 48; Nagam Aiya, V., *Travancore State Manual* Volume One - Part 1. N.p.: Independently Published, 2018.

well as Native…[T]he Town is liberally supplied with well equipped colleges, schools and hospitals. It has greatly improved of late in structural grandeur…" it seems evident from the scattered information available that even as the town was expanding, most non European Christians, Muslims and lower castes lived outside town limits, in the outskirts. However, the place that was proximate to the Fort that offered a different perspective was Chalai market, which was, as Mateer termed it, the "centre of the native town." Even though he didn't seem to be much of a fan of the market, "[T]he close and impure atmosphere is laden with vile smells of every conceivable description," he did observe that "crowds of people" constantly passed each other, "to and from the Fort", as they were transacting their business.[22] Even though none of the 19th c. material that I have looked at until now specifically mentions names of merchants who had shops in Chalai, we do know that they traded in all manners of merchandise, from rice, "curry stuffs, roots, fruits… cloth and ornaments, boxes, brass and tin ware", and even "books and stationary."[23]While not part of the main part of Trevandrum at that time, places like "Manacaud" were identified by Mateer as a "Mohamedan" settlement quarter, which also housed the royal stables. Sharad Sunder Rajeev's work shows that this was also home to some important Ashari (artisanal and craftsworker) families.[24] Further on, Pettah seems to have a small settlement of rather impoverished descendants of the Dutch and the Portuguese, then known as the "East Indians" (and now Anglo),

22. Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity,* New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1991, 286-7.

23. ibid., 287.

24. Rajeev, *The King's Craftsmen.*

and the Roman Catholic population seems to have been distributed between there and Valiatura, which had both fishing communities, and some Shanar settlements.[25]

Though the Muslim population of Trivandrum town wasn't very big in the 19th c. it certainly had some distinctive features that help us refine our understanding of Islamic communities in Kerala, and also of ways of thinking Kerala's presence in Indian Oceanic histories. Most of the Muslim settlements, Manacaud onwards, were Tulukkan (or Turushka, those who were of Turkish descent); at least some of these groups were identified as Ravuthar (who in the Census of 1911 were seen as Tulukkan).[26] Those identified as "Methan" were described as the descendants of "old Musalman merchants and their converts," and were the ones who settled in the old maritime trading centres and taluks. Chirayankil was one of the places that was within Trivandrum district, and produced one of the best known Muslims of the region, Vakkam Maulavi. In years to come, he was to set up the MES hostel for boys in Puthenchanda in Trivandrum, where another luminary, Seethi Sahib, lived when he was a student.[27] While the Census has interesting data on "immigrants" into the town and the district (as well as numbers for "emigrants" from the town), it does not disaggregate this on the basis of religion, caste or even employment. However, preliminary informal interviews conducted by me with some Chalai workers suggests that at least some of the Muslim merchants and traders who came and

25. Mateer, *Land of Charity,* 287.

26. Census, 1901, 354.

27. KM Seethi, 'Islamile Ijtihadum Vakkam Moulaviyude Mathanavikarana Prasthanavum,' https://vmft.org/vakkom-moulavi/) (Seethi Sahib met Vakkam Moulavi in 1919, so this hostel was set before that).

settled in Manakkad and around, came from Tiruvthamcode in present day Tamilnadu. It is unclear how early movement from this region started, though A. Sajeena Beevi's work on Travancore suggests that there trade and religious links between Tiruvthamcode and parts of Travancore, including Trivandrum for several centuries.[28]Certainly by 1928 we have a mosque (Karupattikadai Juma Masjid) that was built inside the market. Both Raja Mohamed's work on the Muslims of the Coromandel[29]and Sajeena Beevi's work have suggestive possibilities for understanding the character of Muslims, not only in and around Trivandrum, but also of the links between Travancore, the Coromandel coast (or Mabar), and present day Lakshadweep. The Marakkayar (Maraikar in Kerala), Labbai, and Rawther, were Arabi Tamil descendants, and the Deccani (often called Pattani in south Kerala, and Trivandrum) were of Turkish descent, and were originally Urdu speaking people, who seem to have come from the Deccani kingdoms via Tamilnadu to join the royal militia in Travancore. Most of these were titular terms, and large numbers of them were involved in a spectrum of seafaring and maritime activities, which could vary from shipbuilding and trade, to just sailing or working as porters. The Rawther (Ravuther) were associated with horse training and care, so it is likely that the "Mohamedans" of "Manacaud" mentioned by Mateer were Ravuther, especially as the royal stables were located there.

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28. Sajeena Beevi, 'Genesis and Growth of Muslims in Travancore: A historical Enquiry', April, 2017, http://www.indianruminations.com/contents/research-article-contents/genesis-growth-muslims-travancore-history-enquiry/

29. Raja Mohamed, *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims: A Socio-Historical Study of the Tamil Muslims 1750-1900,* Chennai: Government Museum, 2004.

# SPACES, BODIES, ABSENCES

## SOME QUESTIONS WHILE WRITING A HISTORY OF TRIVANDRUM, CA 1800 – 1930

**PART II**

By the early 20th c. it is clear that Trivandrum had expanded well beyond the Fort, with a substantial amount of construction work, including the Observatory, churches (Church of England, Christ's; Roman Catholic Cathedral and the LMS Church), temples (Ganapati in the Palayam/Cantonment area), and a mosque (Palayam Juma Masjid) was going on in the town. This also included the laying of new roads. What is unclear is who made these (as in the laboring population); where did the construction labourers come from and where did they live? Equally unclear is to which communities the labouring population belonged. It is in the process of trying to uncover answers to some of these questions that I began to look at the history of 'public works' in Trivandrum, which provides a fascinating and very different way of imagining the town. It is to this,

or a small part of the extensive discussions about what was known as the Town Improvement Committee (henceforth TIC), and their concerns with sanitation and hygiene, as also of ideas of "public" and "public use" that I shall now turn briefly.

What is most striking about this corpus of material is that, for the most part, bodies of people, with their markers of identification, be it caste or religion seems to disappear, to be replaced by a new administrative language of sanitation, hygiene, cleanliness and decency. This is accompanied by the term public, which produced the idea of an unmarked populace in a period that was deeply marked by differences of caste, economic status and religious community. Yet, despite such a biopolitical move, it's worth noting that in the early years of the setting up of several administrative institutions, the older monarchical brahminism that enabled a prior Savarna claim to social spaces, be these of residence, movement or worship, continued to shape 'modern' administrative practices. This appears to be true of recruitment practices too, except that barring the officers the rest of the functionaries remain unnamed (at least in the records I have seen thus far). For the purposes of this argument, I shall discuss a few representative instances, and unpack their implications.

In 1913[30], a letter from the President of the TIC to the PWD says that of the 31 tanks then identified in the town, the public used 23.[31]He goes on to add that "those not needed for public purposes should be

[30.] File no. 8381, Bundle no. 281, Draining Public Tanks in Trivandrum, 1913.

[31.] File no. 8381, ibid., Letter no. 2535 of 6/5/13.

registered" and that these were mostly "insanitary".[32] He specially mentioned Pathmatirtham and Srivaraham tanks that hadn't yet been drained, and says that these are very insanitary. The details recorded in these discussions also mention that some "Brahmin petitioners wanted a mantapam to be built on the western bank of the Sreevaraham tank as it was being drained then, and also wanted new kulappuras with dwarf walls for better light and ventilation".[33]One Venkat Rao who had been asked to check the necessity for these structures reported back that these were "very urgent" as this was the "only place where funeral ceremonies are performed by Brahmins in the fort and surrounding places".[34] Needless to say we know nothing about the funerary or ablution needs of other communities, though tanks like Chettykulam and Vaniyencolam in Vanchiyoor were named as those needing cleaning. Their names, and locations, are indicative of who would have used them, though I am yet to find any petitions from these communities requesting that some special need of theirs be met.

The early 20th century was also a time when discussions were ongoing about improving the water supply and the drainage systems in Trivandrum[35]. The Chief Engineer had deemed this work necessary, and advised that even if someone with a competent knowledge of sanitary engineering wasn't immediately available, someone temporary ought to

32. Ibid.

33. ibid.

34. ibid.

35. Improvement of Drains and Water Supply to the Town of Trivandrum, File 1886, 30th November of 1912, General and Revenue Secretariat, PW Section, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

be employed to get the work done. In the Fort the urgency was because the drains ran behind the houses, and the President of the TIC suggested that the drains ought be covered with "cement slabs, with manholes at intervals for cleaning purposes".[36]If we read this along with the plans for building latrines and urinals in the town, we begin to see the ways in which Brahmanical and Savarna practices of exclusion, and hierarchical practices of giving priority to their needs were replicated faithfully in Town Planning measures of the government. An administrative report of 1896 states that the government sanctioned constructing 8 latrines, and that orders were awaited.[37]The Sanitary Department was set up in 1893-4, and the TICs were organised for improving the sanitation of towns, and also for registering births and deaths.[38]The general thrust of the 1896 report was that "in the interest of decency and cleanliness", latrines should be provided, as their absence in inhabited parts of the town was causing great inconvenience to people as the population was increasing. The Town Magistrate in his letter to the District Magistrate wrote that "I may also add that the punishments I am obliged to inflict on offenders against public sanitation under the above circumstances are hardly fair, as the majority of cases they are forced to ease themselves in the fields and open spaces adjoining public highways."[39] There was much to and fro about where the public latrines should be located, as many suggestions were shot down on grounds of their proximity to

36. Ibid.

37. File no. 139, of 1906, P.W. section, In the Trivandrum town – construction of on type designs furnished by the Sanitary Commissioner. Part 1.

38. Nagam Aiya, Travancore State Manual, p. 789.

39. File no. 139, of 1906, ibid.

markets, and to water bodies used for bathing. A sanitary inspector called B. Krishna Rao wrote to the President of the TIC in 1895 about a new kind of latrine. He said that "an ingenious device knows as Donaldson's night soil ejector has been in invented whereby the excreta and earth are placed in a large hopper which is continuous with an iron casing containing an Archimedean screw." While this kind of latrine must indeed have been ingenious at that time, what is striking about the Inspector's recommendation is that he adds that the mixture of earth and excreta would be "received into baskets in which it can be conveyed to the place of disposal or immediately applied to the gardens." One of its many advantages he mentions is that saved 30% of labour.[40]

What is of course immediately striking is that there is no mention whatsoever about who would clean drains, tanks or urinals and latrines. Would those carrying away night soil, or mixture of excreta and earth ejected by the ingenious Donaldson's device be allowed to use those toilets? Where was the 'ingenious mix of excreta and earth' to be disposed off? Where did the manual scavengers live and on what grounds were they hired to perform such degrading labour? Were they paid or was this *begar*? Jubba Ramakrishnan, an important early Congress activist and leader organized the scavengers' union in Trivandrum[41]and it's possible that some of the sanitation workers may have, after 1940, settled in parts of the poramaboke (private) lands in and around the

40. ibid.

41. J. Devika, Land, Politics, Work and Home-Life in a City Slum, Working Paper No. 454, Centre for Development Studies, 2014, p.27

town[42]. Recent documentary films by Jithin S. R. (*Chengalchoolayude Atmakatha*) and Biju Muthathi (*Talasthanam Chuttedutha Cheri*), speak about the discrimination faced by people, many of whom are Dalit, including routine police harassment. Malayankil Gopalakrishnan traces the history of the informal settlement to 1865, when the Secretariat building was being constructed, and workers brought into Trivandrum and settled in this area. It is unclear whether there was continuous occupation of this area since then, or whether it fell fallow, only to be re-occupied again.

The discussions on the Connemara Market Improvement is similarly significant because of what it tells us about the kinds of commodities on sale in the market (vegetable, beef, mutton and fish), and at least a glimpse of what was then being considered 'improvement'. The beef stall renovation, for instance, was ostensibly being done at the behest of the butcher who felt the "public have free access to the stalls."[43]The TIC noted in its files that the "floor is dirty and does not admit of it being thoroughly washed" and proposed that other than building doors leading to the stalls, and setting up stone tables, the floor would also be re-done in "gravel concrete cement."[44]What is striking here is the butcher's use of the term 'public', which at first glance, seems to replicate the TIC's use of the term, was obviously very different. In the

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42. Madhusoodhanan, V., Rehabilitation for Slum Dwellers in Trivandrum City Corporation, in K.N. Nair and G. Gopikuttan eds., *Housing in Kerala: Impact of Investment, Technology and Institutions,* Delhi: Daanish Books, 2006, p. 128.

43. File no. 215 of 1912, Connemara Market, improving the existing buildings and premises, PW Section, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

44. Ibid.

absence of any mention of who ran the shops, or indeed who shopped there, one may wish to project back from contemporary meat and fish trade related practices to speculate on its historical antecedents. Most butcher shops in today's Trivandrum are owned and run by Christians, and Muslims. While fish trade has representation across community, most of these people would belong to the Mukkuva or Araya castes, even if they were converts. Again, while large numbers of Malayalis, even of the non Brahmanical Savarna castes were fish eaters, shifts in dietary practices, especially eating beef (and for everyone, chicken), appears to be of rather recent vintage[45]. The two taken together would suggest that the early 20th c butcher's notion of the 'public' seems to be a reference to not the 'Brahmins' as public, but in all likelihood to the larger population of non Hindus, and avarna meat eating population. What is more ambiguous is the concern that he appears to have about the public having unimpeded access to his stall.

So how must one read these historical traces? I would suggest that spatiality cannot be conceptualized unless one engages the complex histories of its usage. This perforce also demands that this needs to account for exclusionary practices, especially in a period when 'the public' would approximate what we would today use in common parlance to refer to 'the private' – except that in this instance it was underwritten by caste privilege and entitlement. Yet, the absence, and willful ejection of avarna castes from 'public spaces' and perforce public

45. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-beef-became-malayalis-object-of-desire/;
https://qz.com/india/1387151/vegetarian-indias-secret-love-affair-with-chicken/

life, was accompanied by their shadowy presence as those who cleaned, built and worked in all capacities that enabled civic life for the caste elite, and the English. Kerala is a state that has had a long history of caste based exclusion. Yet as early as 1893, Ayyankali, then a young man of 30, led the battle for Dalits to occupy public roads, and rode his bullock cart from Venganur to Trivandrum (subsequently renamed as the 'villuvandi samaram').[46] It would of course take many decades before this act of fierce defiance would translate into a right for all Dalits. In 1919, the League for Equal Civic Rights that brought together the "Christian, Ezhava and Mahomedan and other communities of the state" presented a memorial to the then Dewan of Travancore.[47] Their request was that all branches of government service be opened to all communities, and to avarna Hindus. However as Robin Jeffrey has shown, the Civic Rights League quickly forgot its anti untochability programme, especially when the requests of elite educated Syrian Christians had been met.[48]In all this what is still unclear is where the majority of workers, be they cleaners, sanitation workers, road builders, construction labourers, butchers or fish workers lived. And which roads, paths or by lanes, were available to them for routine use, with or without harassment.

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46. https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/mahatma-ayyankali-ride-689820.html (downloaded 4/7/2020).

47. K. K. Kusuman, *The Abstention Movement. India:* Kerala Historical Society, 1976.

48. Robin Jeffrey, *People, Princes, and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States.* India: Oxford University Press, 1978.

## Epilogue

In the absence of any final sets of conclusions in this preliminary paper, I wish to end this paper with an epilogue – to mark one of the biggest frustrations faced by historians attempting to read the past intersectionally. This is the absence of women in most of the different kinds of archives that I have looked at. Needless to say I wasn't looking to add more to an old historiographical practice of rendering Kerala's, especially Travancore's, past as the domain of the monarchs. If that were the case, there would be enough for me to begin ploughing through. In fact the only form of writing that acknowledges the presence of women, albeit not as named, individuated beings, are Censuses (this can be seen as early as Ward and Conner's early Census exercise). The exception to this was the engaging and insightfully written book 'Land of the Conch Shell'[49], written by the Zenana missionary, Augusta Blandford. Blandford spent forty four years as a missionary in Travancore, and died back in England a few years after the book was published in 1900. Bringing details of her work, travel and people she encountered, the book is at once ethnography, history, analyses and a reflection on the kinds of changes that were much needed not only in Trivandrum, but all of Travancore. The photographs in the books themselves are an archive unto itself, and present a rarity for that period as pictures of girls and women far outweigh those of men. Most of the pictures are of women and girls from ordinary backgrounds, and some are of the converted missionaries, the Bible women. Once again, clearly it is the evangelical

[49] Augusta Blandford, *The Land of the Conch Shell: A Short History of Travancore and C.E.Z. Mission Work There*. United Kingdom: Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, 1900.

missionary archive, with all its limitations, that chronicles the travails and achievements of subaltern lives, and to which those of us concerned with reading the histories of space and place intersectionally, must turn to.

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