

**POIKAYIL YOHANNAN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF
EDUCATION OF THE DALITS IN KERALA – AN OVERVIEW**

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Abstract

Kerala is one of the greatest hub of education not only in the present world but also since the earliest period. There are lots of social reformers emerged in Kerala. Contributions of all of them can be written in the golden script. Poikayilyohannan was one among them. He was a great visionary. He made lot of changes in the society especially for the well being of Dalits. Present study is related with Poikayilyohannan and his contributions in the field of education of the Dalits. He done great works for the Dalits with the help of Sreemoolam Prajasabha. The Study helps to know more about Poikayil Yohannan and his life.

Introduction

Kerala is ranked as one of the most literate states in India. This shows how important education is among the Keralites. Kerala has made significant achievements in the field of social development and standard of life. In Kerala the priority is always given to education and literacy. The importance and antiquity of **education in Kerala** are underscored by the state's ranking as among the most literate in the country. The educational transformation of Kerala was triggered by the efforts of the Church Mission Society missionaries, who were the pioneers that promoted mass education in Kerala, in the early decades of the 19th century. Good education aroused aspirations of the people and the main aim is always to improve the quality of the education provided. There were lots of people in Kerala who gave great contributions in the field of education. These people include mostly social reformers. These social reformers had great part in the upliftment of different categories in the society. Poikayil Yohannan was one of the greatest social reformers in the history of kerala. Poikayil Yohannan was one of the great visionaries and social reformers in the history of Kerala. His contributions in the field of education are appreciable. Sometimes the present scenario forgets the works of social reformers. Their life stories and contributions are always an inspiration to the present people. The present study is very much helpful to those who really want to know about Poikayil Yohannan and his contributions in the field of education.

An overview of the life and contributions of Poikayil Yohannan

Poykayil Yohannan was a Dalit activist, a poet and a social reformer from the erstwhile Princely state of Travancore. His place of birth is in Kottayam district of the present-day Kerala state.

He is known amongst his followers as PoikayilAppachan or Kumara Gurudevan. PoikayilJohannan or Poykayil Yohannan was a Christian Preacher by profession. He was responsible for the establishment of the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha or God's Church of Visible Salvation. The reason behind the founding of this organization was the disillusionment he had got from his close association with various Christian groups in the country. Through this organization, he wanted to tell his followers that the way of spiritual liberation helps them to break the chains of bondage or slavery, and the view of caste discrimination. In order to help his followers to physically free themselves from the clutches of the caste discrimination, he had set up a chain of industrial training centres and schools to educate and equip them for their independent existence.

In his lifetime, the members of Dalit communities practiced untouchability amongst themselves. Yohannan was deeply pained by this tendency amongst the members of the lower castes. In order to trace the root of this custom in the society, he started reading books on these topics. From books, Yohannan realized that the members of Paraiyar, Pulayar and Kuravar communities shared a common lineage in the history of Kerala. Therefore, he decided to bring the members of these communities on one platform by properly educating them about their lineage. To make this happen, Poykayil Yohannan left the Shankaramangalam Christian family and started to meet the members of his community personally to generate this awareness in their minds.

After the realization about the discrimination of Christianity to the Dalits, Yohannan decided to leave the religion of Christianity and form a new organization for the liberation of Dalit community members. With this conviction in his mind, he formed a new organization by the name Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS). From this point in time, he was referred to as PoikayilAppachan or Kumara Gurudevan. After the formation of a neo-reformist organization, PoikayilAppachan met people from different communities personally and educated them about the need for living in a dignified way. For this purpose, he exhorted his followers to liberate themselves from the clutches of caste equation through the twin powers of education and enlightenment.

In order to cater to the growing requirements of his organization, Poikayil Yohannan decided to buy 125 acres of land in different parts of the erstwhile Princely state of Travancore. The management of these properties was done from the organization's headquarters at Eraviperoor. Using these properties, the places of worship, schools and training institutes were constructed at different places in the Travancore state. For developing and igniting the minds of his brethren, a number of vocational training institutes were developed to impart quality training to them.

These educational institutions were set up with the liberal government aid and support. Poykayil Yohannan was also a member of another Dalit advocacy group by the name SadhujanaParipalanaSangham, which was floated by Saint Ayyankali to further the cause of the group. His stature as the Dalit leader grew several bounds due to his association with several Dalit associations, including that of Ayyankali. After doing the ground work, Yohannan decided to participate in the state parliamentary politics. He was nominated to the SreeMoolamPraja Sabha for two times. It is the Legislative Council of the Princely state of Travancore. In Sree MoolamPraja Sabha, Yohannan made a historic presentation on the plight of the depressed classes in the state.

Through his forceful speech, he spoke on the topics of the education and employment of Dalit youths and the existing disparity between Dalit Christians and Syrian Christians. On the topic of discrepancy, he further elaborated that the Christian converts from communities such as Paraya, Pulaya, Kuravar and Marvar were discriminated against by the majority members of the Christian community. After the forceful presentation on Dalit issues, he dwelled upon the measures he prescribed for their betterment. This included job reservations, land allotments and fee concessions to uplift the lifestyles of hopeless Dalit families. Poikayil Yohannan was a Dalit leader, a poet and a social reformer from the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. He was also a Christian preacher who was highly concerned about the welfare of the depressed classes in the state. In the initial days of struggle against the caste discrimination, Johannan believed that the members of the Christian communities would lend their helping hand to his caste members. Some years later, he learned in a hard way the existing caste discrimination in those Christian Communities. Hence, he decided to form an organization to support the cause of his fellow caste members. This organization was christened as Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha. Johannan encouraged both Christian converts and Hindu Dalits to take membership of the organization.

By pooling the resources donated by the members of the organization, a land bank was made. This land bank was used to construct numerous institutions for the benefit of its members. Because of the dedication and good work shown by him, Yohannan was twice nominated to the SreeMoolamPraja Sabha. At the Praja Sabha, he made a forceful presentation on the plight of Dalits in the state and suggested some measures to improve their living conditions. As a Dalit leader he tried his best to enhance the life of his fellow beings. His contributions in the field of education helped a lot to the Dalits to become in front of the society. For encouraging the Dalits he made lots of things through the support of the royal family. Because of all these things Poikayil Yohannan is considered as a great leader and a great visionary.

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