Shifting Temperance Landscapes: Locating Caste and Gender within the Spatial Politics of Drink in the Madras Presidency

TARANGINI SRIRAMAN

Abstract. This article examines spatio-political formulations of drink in caste terms during the 1930s in the Madras Presidency (region) in colonial South India. It advances two arguments. The first argument is that the temperance agitation, driven by the regional wing of the dominant nationalist party organization, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, relied on physical, legal, and social formulations of space expressed in caste terms. One such articulation entailed the likening of toddy to the menstrual blood of an Adi-Dravida woman. The second, more critical argument is that the resignifying of stigmatizing meanings of alcohol within egalitarian and empowering temperance landscapes of Adi-Dravida political formations is deliberate. The article demonstrates the urgency of framing temperance vis-a-vis Dalit politics of public space in overarching terms. It also asks and answers the critical question of how Adi-Dravida and Tamil Nadu Congress political figures imagined each other and manifested in each other's spatial sites of alcohol.

Tarangini Sriraman is currently a Wellcome Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London. This article's research was funded by Azim Premji University and the Charles Wallace India Trust. She thanks the anonymous reviewers, the journal's editors, Amme Shirisha, Jagadish Babu, Bhaskar Rao Ramineni, Pooja Satyogi, Amit Kumar, Karuna DW, and Bindu Menon for their help in writing this article.

Electronically published March 24, 2023

The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs: An Interdisciplinary Journal, volume 37, number 1, spring 2023. https://doi.org/10.1086/723364

In September 1931, S. Ahmed Ali, the subdivisional magistrate (SDM) of Ranipet, issued a "prohibitory order" that prevented the gathering of Tamil Nadu Congress picketers outside shops that sold toddy and arrack—local fermented and distilled drinks—in this town in North Arcot, a district in the Madras Presidency (region) within colonial South India. Such prohibitory orders under the still-infamous Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC; which banned the assembly of more than five persons) were common during the apogee of the antiliquor movement in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the events that unfolded in Ranipet pointed to a telling conflagration. In issuing the order, the SDM pointed in his report to the testimony provided by the Circle (administrative subdivision) police inspector, who in turn recorded vile abuse of a toddy shop by Congress picketers. This abuse relied on intense and gendered caste hatred that likened toddy to the menstrual blood of an Adi-Dravida woman. The term "Adi-Dravida" encompassed Dalit communities in the Tamil-speaking southern districts of the Madras presidency.

While one can construe this as a colonial-nationalist encounter evidenced by the clash between the SDM and the Circle police inspector, on the one hand, and the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC), on the other, I read this incident as yielding different historiographical questions. I ask, "In what ways might we approach picketing as laden by a spatio-political imagination of caste?" The archives I explored with a view to understanding the social history of alcohol in colonial South India generated this question about the methods used by the TNCC in its temperance agitation and the role of caste discrimination and social violence within it. This question is particularly salient given what has been learned about the Congress-led antidrink agitation in the Madras and Bombay presidencies—namely, that it was seen to be morally uplifting, that it resulted in the successful socioeconomic empowerment of "the poor" and "the low castes." and that it laid the foundations for Prohibition long after independence.[1]

I see this question as yielding another equally critical question: Does picketing by the Congress exhaust all possibilities of temperance sites in the early twentieth century, or were there other sites of temperance anticaste assertions from the margins? The second question is critical

1. See, esp., C. Rajagopalachari Papers (Rajaji Papers), installment 4, subject file 11, Nehru Memorial and Museum Library (NMML), New Delhi. See also the writings of the Prohibition League of India in installments 6–12 in the same papers.

not simply to disaggregate temperance discourses and agitation but also to analyze salient spatial formulations of caste and gender in Tamil Nadu Congress picketing sites and distinctive anticaste politics of drink that figured in nonelite regional associations of the Adi-Dravidas.

Elsewhere and outside colonial South India, scholars have contoured antidrink politics in caste and *adivasi*, or tribal, terms by tracing "spontaneous" and "sporadic" agitations among Koli, Pasi, Bhandari, and adivasi (backward caste, Dalit, and tribal) communities.[2] Scholars like David Hardiman and Indra Saldanha have argued that subaltern classes rejected both state initiatives (by the colonial state) and "elite values" (e.g., those espoused by the Congress) to oppose drink on "customary" grounds and resist exploitative practices of excise, usury, and landlordism.[3]

This article goes beyond existing social histories of alcohol. I argue for examining the spatial politics of alcohol regulation in the Madras Presidency, not just propelled by the Congress through its temperance agitation but also framed by Dalit politics of space vis-à-vis alcohol, as explored across associations and legislative bodies. I address these questions and advance this argument by demonstrating that alcohol and especially toddy spaces were physically, socially, and legally imbued in terms of caste. Subsequently, I call for scrutinizing the caste politics of space that lie at the heart of shifting temperance landscapes.

The physical and legal conceptions of space worked in tandem—the picketing spaces engendered by the TNCC volunteers were made possible by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, signed 5 March 1931, which allowed for peaceful picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops under stringent conditions. I will show caste as entering these picketing spaces through a close reading of the 1931 incident described at the start of the article. In advancing the social conception of space, I touch on Congress imaginaries of caste pollution by dwelling on how caste slurs filtered picketing

2. For instance, David Hardiman and Indra Saldanha recorded short-lived temperance agitations against tree taxes and toddy regulations as well as Parsi usury practices among Kolis (fishermen), Bharwads, and Dheds (Dalits) in coastal regions of Bombay Presidency. These agitations took the form of Devi movements, which entailed propitiating the goddess by deliberate moves of abstaining from drink. Indra Munshi Saldanha, "On Drinking and 'Drunkenness': History of Liquor in Colonial India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 37 (September 1995): 2323–31; David Hardiman, "From Custom to Crime: The Politics of Drinking in Colonial Gujarat" in *Subaltern Studies IV*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 165–228; David Fahey and Padma Manian, "Poverty and Purification: The Politics of Gandhi's Campaign for Prohibition," *Historian* 67, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 489–506.
3. Hardiman, "From Custom to Crime," 167.

practices; for the most part, I highlight Adi-Dravida discourses of temperance as manifest in associational and discursive expressions that sought to radically reform the Dalit subject in bodily, material, and spiritual senses.[4] In these discourses, space doubles as both public places where untouchability is denounced and associational spaces in which alcohol consumption is decried. Rather than treat these two readings of space separately within Adi-Dravida discourses, I see what they mean when one meets the other.

Such a politics entailed radical mobilizations to reclaim public spaces that were closed to those deemed "lower castes" and the purging of alcohol itself from homes and workplaces such as factories and industries. I read these expressions as not only opposing but also resignifying temperance's meanings when Adi-Dravidas sought to purge liquor as a site of employment and income, and prevailed on those in their community dependent on toddy to secure alternative prospects. In doing so, they resorted to what Shailaja Paik regarded to be a hybrid politics of "micro-transformation" of "upper caste social and religious values."[5]

I argue that Adi-Dravida leaders gauged the benefits of prioritizing temperance vis-à-vis other reform agendas within their local and regional bodies and assessed its relative importance in comparison to removing barriers to their access to public places. As historians P. Sanal Mohan and Chinnaiah Jangam indicate, the project of fashioning a Dalit regional and nationalist modernity required contingent evaluations of anticaste regional and associational politics.[6] This article calls for the reassessment of drink and temperance within such a mold.

This article has the following structure. I start with a brief overview of the more commonly known site of the temperance movement led by the TNCC and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. In the second section, I undertake a close reading of the picketing incident in Ranipet town, North Arcot district, which I place within the physical-legal landscape of the pact mediated by the Tamil Nadu Congress leader, C. Rajagopalachari, across the

4. Shailaja Paik, "Dalit Women's Agency and Phule-Ambedkarite Feminism" in *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore (New York: Routledge, 2021), 65–87; P. Sanal Mohan, "Social Space, Civil Society, and Dalit Agency in Twentieth Century Kerala" in *Dalit Studies*, ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Kolkatta: Orient Blackswan, 2016), 74–103.

5. Paik, "Dalit Women's Agency," 72.

6. Mohan, "Social Space"; Chinnaiah Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Madras Presidency. In the third section, I examine the genealogy of the term "Adi-Dravida" and flag the pioneering role of the Adi-Dravida leader, M. C. Rajah, in his prescriptive reading of Adi-Dravida and temperance discourses as bound together. In the fourth section, I explore the distinctive articulations of Adi-Dravidas around temperance in associational, legislative, and other spaces and how they formed multiple regional political subjectivities that strove against their stigmatization as polluted agents of drink. This section also crucially considers Adi-Dravida conceptions of public space against the backdrop of temperance reform—both its own and that of the Congress.

The fifth section looks at the caste-inflected conceptions of space conjured by Congress picketing and how it conflated its hatred of Adi-Dravidas with its aversion to drink. More significantly, it foregrounds historiographical questions about the implications of this conflation, especially when read against the Adi-Dravida constructions of subjectivities around alcohol. The fourth and fifth sections also suggest that Adi-Dravida subjectivities around alcohol cannot be sequestered from Adi-Dravida discourses denouncing a politics of public space that thrives on untouchability. The conclusion proffers suggestions for recasting histories around temperance politics of the early twentieth century.

The TNCC Antiliquor Landscape and Gandhi-Irwin Pact

Before I narrate the Ranipet incident, I would like to place it within the larger physical-legal landscape of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the TNCC's affinity for an antidrink nationalist politics. It was in the hands of C. Rajagopalachari, or "Rajaji," that the noncooperation movement took roots in the Madras Presidency. Although it resembled the movement elsewhere, in that TNCC pickets were formed against foreign cloth and alcohol, the antiliquor agitation carried forth the nationalist movement assertively and anxiously, especially in these parts.[7] Congress picketers in the frenzied but carefully organized campaign worked on

7. This can be attested to archivally by the sheer density of Rajaji papers on subjects of alcohol, temperance, and Prohibition at NMML. See also Darinee Alagirisamy, "The Problem with Neera: The (Un)making of a National drink in Late Colonial India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 56, no. 1 (2019): 77–97; Robert Eric Colvard, "A World without Drink: Temperance in Modern India 1880–1940" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2013), 259.

different scales by targeting toddy shops, auctions, people's homes, and temples that leased out coconut trees for toddy-tapping.

The antiliquor movement across various parts was popularized through the "constructive program" in the mid-1920s, which was inspired by "the global temperance movement" and an imperative to halt mounting liquor revenues.[8] The agitation in the Madras Presidency must also be placed within the new momentum that antiliquor mobilization gathered within the mofussil during the noncooperation movement of the early 1920s. David Arnold writes that the antiliquor agitation was propelled by, among others, urban congressmen; the famous Dravidian (backward castes) leader E. V. Ramaswami Naicker, popularly termed "Periyar"; and the rural dominant caste of Gounders, driven by a "quest for self-respectability" to dissociate themselves from alcoholism.[9] Picketing, a strategy adopted at this time, was calibrated to create popular hostility to the colonial excise policy and came to be practiced aggressively during the civil disobedience movement of the early 1930s. This strategy, in these two decades, underscored the nationalist vigor of young volunteers and enlisted existing social institutions like caste panchayats to enforce a boycott of alcohol.

Gandhi shaped the political stances of TNCC by dynamically advocating Prohibition on various grounds. These included foregrounding the "loss of revenue," balanced by "the gain . . . from prohibition" for "the poor"; the need to empower women and alleviate their "domestic misery" and the family's "ruined health"; and the necessity of halting the rapidly increasing excise revenue.[10] For Gandhi, the campaign against drink was nothing short of a call for "self-purification," in that he believed temperance to be morally virtuous, socially elevating, and "ennobling" of national qualities. While pointing this out, David Fahey

8. Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 36.

9. David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India 1919–37* (London: Routledge, 1977), 64–65. As a TNCC member, Periyar picketed toddy shops and felled coconut trees in his farm. But when he left Congress, his politics shifted as he regarded untouchability and "religious fanaticism" to be more serious evils than liquor. Periyar Thanthai and K. Veeramani, *Collected Works of Periyar EVR* (Chennai: Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution, 2005), 72.

10. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "To the Women of India," *Young India*, 10 April 1930; "Curse of Drink" in *Women and Social Injustice* (Ahmedabad: Navjeevan, 1947), 80–87); M. K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 9 September 1946 (title unknown).

and Padma Manian also write that Gandhi considered drink to be the worst thing after untouchability.[11]

With a few exceptions, however, scholarship has not noted that Gandhi drew a deep-seated connection between drink and untouchability. He did this by reinforcing the stigma against drink by arguing for the isolation of "slaughter-houses, toddy-shops, and houses of ill-fame."[12] He also bemoaned how certain communities were treated as untouchable even though they had given up drink.[13]

At the helm of the Congress campaign against alcohol in Madras Presidency was C. Rajagopalachari, who eventually launched Prohibition into municipal and national politics.[14] Rajaji was a lawyer from Salem district in the Madras Presidency, but his march into regional politics was inflected not so much by his legal practice as by his politics as "a Hindu nationalist" and Gandhian loyalist.[15]

Rajaji emulated Gandhi in his voluble propogandist writing in various papers including *The Hindu*; he also drew on the latter's prohibitionist writing in Gandhi's publications like *Harijan*, *Navajivan*, and *Young India*, which he edited at some point. He sharpened Gandhi's critiques of drink-derived excise by elaborating at various points in his career how Prohibition can offset loss of revenue. He argued that with or without Prohibition, the regulation of trade, government monopolies, and licenses was expensive. Prohibition would address the drain on national resources by removing addicts and improving productivity, and thus save costs on policing. He asserted that illicit manufacture occurred even under a license system.[16]

Deploying the press, and particularly *The Hindu*, as their arsenal, the TNCC and Rajaji used their editorials to mobilize and manufacture middle-class anger against toddy renters and arrack vendors. It was in

11. Fahey and Manian, "Poverty and Purification," 489.

12. M. K. Gandhi, "The Curse of Untouchability," *Young India*, 29 July 1927, as cited in M. K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, ed. M. K. Prabhu (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1947), 253.

13. One such exception is P. C. Joshi, "In the Lap of the Himalaya: Gandhi's Visit to Uttarakhand," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 4 (2001): 3300–3310.

14. Rajaji, cited in A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *Tamil Characters, Personalities, Politics, Culture* (New Delhi: Pan Macmillan India, 2018), 283.

15. Arnold, *Congress in Tamilnad*, 37. He was able to translate his political leverage into a leading regional position as premier of the Madras Assembly and, later, a national position such as the first governor general of India.

16. C. Rajagopalachari, "Prohibition" in *Rajaji Reader: Selections from the Writings of C. Rajagopalachari*, ed. Vuppuluri Kalidas (Madras: Vyasa, 1980).

The Hindu that Rajaji also engaged in a war of words with colonial authorities about the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and its interpretation.

This pact, termed the Delhi Pact, was signed in 1931 and entailed a trade-off: Congress called off its civil disobedience movement in return for an assurance that Gandhi would assume a salient role in the Round Table Conference. However, the Congress was able to secure one exception in the form of picketing liquor shops, which could be carried out under certain stipulations.[17] In deference to the letter of this pact, these instructions contained strictures of the distance at which picketers had to stand from the shop (20 yards) and the number of picketers permitted outside it (a total of six persons). They also specified the appointment of the "Picketing-in-Charge," who was to ensure these rules were heeded. This person was also referred to as the *Sarvadhikari*, or the "dictator," in the diction deployed by the TNCC.[18]

The rules also stated that only influential people should form the picketing party; there should be no crowding and not even a trace of coercion; and picketers should not touch or obstruct anyone's passage. However, it must be noted that there were multiple interpretations of the distance at which picketers had to stand from the shops on different occasions, and there were angry disputes between British authorities and the TNCC about where the pact stood on the matter of picketing auctions.[19] In addition, Congress picketers were told to exercise patience in the face of all provocations, and their actions were to be marked by "courtesy to officers of the government."[20]

This document in turn threw up endless legal tussles over Section 144 CrPC under which prohibitory orders were issued against picketing. A prohibitory order under this section entailed the banning of the assembly of more than five persons and forced the closure of picketing within the region where these clashes were reported.[21] In the instance of picketing,

17. Colvard, "World without Drink."

18. This Tamil term was transliterated in English in the original text of Government Order (G.O.) No. 1219, Public (Confidential), dated 3 December 1931, Tamil Nadu Archives (TNA).

19. G.O. No. 1219, TNA. Where auctions were concerned, party workers should stand outside the compound of the building where auctions took place. C. Rajagopalachari, கள்ளு, சாராயக்கடை ஏல சாத்வீக மறியல் (Peaceful Picketing of Toddy and Arrack Shop Auctions), TNCC circular issued 29 September 1931, in C. Rajagopalachari Papers, installment 4, subject file 10.

20. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

21. Rajaji Papers, installment 4, subject file 11.

Section 144 was invoked whenever colonial authorities, and especially the SDM, received reports that the rules of the pact had been violated. The interpretations of these twin legal documents—the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and Section 144 CrPC—became an embattled and embittered site of correspondence and created openings for sanctimonious truth claims that the other side was violent. Instead of reading the document as only foregrounding the conflict between Congress and British authorities, I would like to read the events surrounding the picketing of liquor in 1931 in Ranipet—a town in North Arcot district in the Madras Presidency—as raising critical questions about the spatio-political imagination of caste.

A Flashpoint in Picketing Drink Sales

Across the Madras Presidency in the 1930s, whenever there were serious clashes involving reports of violence and intimidation on the Congress's side, they inevitably ended with a prohibitory order. This official term stated what the Congress sought—prohibition of alcohol—but implied something very different in the context of picketing liquor shops. As such, prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC were issued not only in Ranipet but also in Salem District and Conjeevaram District, all in the same year—1931. The TNCC also complained that a *lathicharge* of picketers occurred in Madura District in this year.[22]

In Ranipet, the SDM's court issued a prohibitory order valid for 2 months on 24 September 1931 and launched Rajaji into a fevered "fact-finding" endeavor of counterclaims to set the record straight for the Congress picketers. By way of expressing his outrage at the prohibitory order, Rajaji wrote a letter on 13 October 1931 to the Secretary to the Government of Madras in which he sought a repeal of this order on the strength of his own outraged narrative around the flurry of incidents.[23] Rajaji wrote that he sent a list of instructions to picketers binding them to the rules that were agreed in the pact.[24]

On 11 September 1931, the Congress's instructions to picketers to abide by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact were sent to the divisional magistrate (DM) for approval. The DM acknowledged this correspondence and

22. Rajaji Papers, installment 4, subject file 11.

23. Letter no. S. 2150, Rajaji to Secretary to the Government of Madras, Crombie, 13 October 1931, and 3 December 1931, G.O. No. 1219, TNA. See also, "Ranipet Prohibitory Order: Enquiry Committee," *The Hindu*, 12 October 1931.

24. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

wrote back, saying that he was deputing an SDM in the district of North Arcot to oversee picketing centers in Ranipet. However, Rajaji added a modification on 19 September 1931, for which he did not receive any acknowledgement from the DM, regarding the distance of the picketers and one particular lane to the left of the toddy shop of Ranipet town. When he eventually received the prohibitory order, Rajaji set up an "unofficial and impartial committee of competent judges" to probe the matter.[25] He reported that the committee acquitted the picketers of all blame based on thorough inquiries. Nevertheless, Rajaji could not help adding something that suggested that a provocation on the part of the TNCC picketers did occur. This Rajaji-instituted committee found that the picketing did not attract any public demonstration until the last day—23 September 1931—through the "high-handed" and "boisterous" actions of the police official on duty, one Walaja, who was the Circle police inspector. The committee reported that it was his actions that instigated the gathering of a crowd and that he "used indecent language to the Picketing-in-Charge and provoked retaliatory word of abuse."[26] Following this, the police had to use force to disperse the crowd—Rajaji found little in the committee's narrative to justify the prohibitory order.

Although the committee instituted by Rajaji stated that picketers did not breach the distance, they conceded that on the last day (i.e., 23 September 1931), the Picketing-in-Charge—a man named Manikka Naicker—did have an "altercation" with the police in which he responded in kind when the police inspector indulged in "very abusive and insulting language toward the dictator."[27] Subsequently, the committee reported the gathering of a boisterous crowd outside the toddy shop that took to chanting *Gandhiji ki jai* (Hail Gandhiji).

Contrary to this retelling of the event, in his statement to the SDM, Police Inspector Walaja minced no words as he created an official account replete with graphic and linguistic testimony of how the Congress picketers willfully transgressed every spatial rule and norm in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. I read this particular account to glean insights into how the rendering of the legal space of picketing was one that blurred the physical, the

25. This committee consisted of the president of the District Board of North Arcot, B. T. Seshadriachariar; A. V. Gangadhara Sastriar, a leading lawyer in Vellore; and three "respectable merchants" of Ranipet, one of whom was, in Rajaji's words, "a leading Mussalman" (colloquial term for "Muslim").

26. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

27. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

social, and the political. The space outside the toddy shop was laden with specters of caste and religion borne by picketers' aversions to drink.

Walaja reported the Congress's picketing to have been marked by "assault and intimidation of consumers," and that, too, from "its very inception," especially in areas like Arkonam and Tirumalpur within the administrative site of Ranipet Division.[28] He went on to recount the many transgressive actions of the picketers spread out over several days, each of which foregrounded the deeply sensory modalities, the violent and intersecting metaphors of untouchability, on which they relied. In his report, the term "Adi-Dravida" was deployed by the picketers repeatedly as a caste slur to evoke effects of self-disgust among marginalized figures who frequented the shop.

Walaja reported the picketers to have "snatched" a "toddy pot" from "an Adi-Dravida" visitor and hurled it to the ground on 2 September. On 16 September, they hurled abuse at Muhammad Mohieddin Sahib by shouting at him, "What menses have you drunk and come here. You are not a proper Musalman. You are a low-born Musalman. You can as well eat pork."[29] On 19 September, they pivoted their attention to T. Appaswami Mudali, schoolmaster of Vannivedu village. Walaja then stated categorically that the volunteers "caught hold of his hand and dragged him out." On 23 September, another picketer, Panchalaraju Mudali was overheard likening toddy to the menstrual blood of an Adi-Dravida woman who was also "a fruit-seller well-known in Ranipet."[30]

The police inspector saw the repeated incursions into the physical space in and around the toddy shop as tantamount to a flagrant violation of the pact itself—in this, he reiterated that he saw eight volunteers (instead of the six permitted) outside the toddy shop "standing in a row across the land barring the passage and thus preventing consumers from going in to the shop."[31] Embedded in his report was a deep-seated conviction that the physical incursion was elevated and sharpened in its meaning by the social coding of toddy as something that inflicted irreparable

28. He identifies these Congress volunteers by name to be Rangaswami Naicken, Khasim Sahib, Uyyaram alias Manickam, Puncharaju Mudali, and Valayakkara Parthasartahy. Of these, he labeled Rangaswami a vegetable seller, Manickam (alias "Uyyaram") to be a vagabond, and Khasim Sahib to be a local rowdy.

29. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

30. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

31. G.O. No. 1219, TNA.

injuries of untouchability, loss of religion, and a gendered pollution of self. The legal act of breaching the pact was sealed for Walaja in terms that collapsed the boundaries between the physical and the social.

The rapid escalation of a low-profile nationalist event into a full-blown one occurred when the Picketing-in-Charge refused to heed the police inspector's instructions to clear the "narrow" passage for entry to the toddy shop and led other volunteers in crying *Gandhi-ki-jai*. A crowd immediately gathered, and its dispersal by lathi and carbine-wielding constables only resulted in their reassembly in the public grounds adjacent to the marketplace. Walaja framed every victim of the picketers' caste-inflected strategy as his witness by identifying them by name and stopping to preface some of these victims as being unsuspecting respectable men of the town. He did this even as he showed Congress picketers to be aggressors, marking them out by name, occupation such as "vegetable seller," and epithets such as "rowdy," "nobodies," and "hooligans" who were hell-bent on "abusing the concession implied in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact."

One could argue that the SDM's report was an official document invested in constructing certain political truths and in painting the Congress picketers in a bad light. However, Walaja himself had nothing to gain from the repeated references to the Adi-Dravida as a "metaphor" to allude to the "polluted" drinker in this picketing incident. I show that these casteist and gender-coded descriptions of Adi-Dravidas can be cross-referenced, as they featured in Congress writing on other occasions as people who perpetuated the drink trade. The gendered caste slurs that Walaja notes are consistent with the ways in which Adi-Dravidas are conjured in editorials and letters of the Rajaji papers. By drawing on all these instances, I argue that social discrimination featured as a modus operandi for the Congress picketers to engineer the physical and legal space of the toddy shop. Before I lay out the Congress narratives that conflate Adi-Dravida women with toddy, I undertake a more urgent task of posing the question, What does the term "Adi-Dravida" mean to those who went by the term itself? This question opens out into a careful examination of what drink meant to the associational spaces and the reformist social worlds of Adi-Dravida subjects.

Adi-Dravida Political Subjectivities

Many genealogies of the term "Adi-Dravida" in the Madras Presidency, which remains the regional focus of this article, start with the story of

how M. C. Rajah was successful in securing official acceptance for this new appellation in administrative records. In his speeches and writings, this early twentieth-century Dalit leader who was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council flagged the term "Adi-Dravida" as one that was collectively affirmed by his "community."[32] This entailed not only a name change from Paraya to Adi-Dravida (Tamil-speaking Dalit subjects) and Panchama to Adi-Andhra (Telugu-speaking Dalit subjects) but also something else. The Resolution that Rajah was instrumental in getting the Madras Legislative Council to pass in 1922 also featured a recommendation to purge the older names from government records.[33] In the most categorical of terms, Rajah declared that the older term "Pariah" connoted "everything that is mean and despicable."[34] In supporting what he regarded as a collective choice of Adi-Dravida, he added, "We wanted a name which would have nothing to do with that most inhuman of human institutions and to indicate the fact that we were the first inhabitants of south India. We wanted a name which would point to our race, origin and geographical position."[35]

Consistent with the call to remove names that convey stigma, the nomenclature of the regional association, the *Parayar Mahajana Sabha* (the Paraya People's Assembly) also underwent change, with the new name *Adi-Dravidar Mahajana Sabha* (Adi-Dravida People's Assembly) chosen as consistent with self-respect for members of the community, whereas "Parayar" was seen as extremely disparaging.

Rajah's assertions find echo in other writings endorsed by Adi-Dravidas within official public realms. A memorial from members of the Madras *Adi Dravida Mahajanasabha* addressed to the viceroy and

32. Iyothee Thass and Swami Sahajananda were some of the Dalit leaders who were believed to have originally contributed to the conception of this name, Adi-Dravida, or the more vernacularized "Adi-Dravidar." M. C. Rajah, however, introduced it into administrative discourse. Michael Bergunder, "Anti-Nationalist and Hindu Nationalist Reconstructions of Early Indian History," *Historiographia Linguistica*, 31, no. 1 (2004): 69; J. Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed and the Adi-Dravida Identity Construction," *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 8, no. 1 (2016): 44.

33. M. C. Rajah, "Deletion of Terms 'Panchama' and 'Paraya' from Government Records" (20 January 1922), in *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M. C. Rajah*, ed. Swaraj Basu (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 166–71.

34. M. C. Rajah, "The Oppressed Hindus" in *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M. C. Rajah*, ed. Swaraj Basu (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 44.

35. Rajah, "Deletion of Terms," 166.

governor-general of India, Reading describes the Adi-Dravidas as "having descended from the original Dravidians who inhabited South India before the incursion of Aryans from the North and being consequently the sons of the soil in a very special sense; we constitute the bulk of the laboring population, especially in rural areas where the caste Hindus depend upon us for cultivating their lands."[36] This was merely one of many memorials sent to the governor-general and the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly called the Simon Commission, by Adi-Dravida deputations from disparate regions like Tinnevelly, Trichinopoly, Ramnad, Chittoor and even British Malaya. These memorials made impassioned pleas for franchise, better educational opportunities, separate electorates, more representation in government and legislature, and economic measures.[37]

In all these instances, the Adi-Dravida memorials belabored two aspects of their background. The first was that they were forced to work in the paddy fields of high-caste Hindus and forced to suffer untouchability even if they formed one-sixth of the population. The second aspect they stressed was their contribution to the expansion of empire in the Madras Presidency, in which they, as "sepoys" (low-ranking soldiers), fought alongside British soldiers. In these accounts, the Adi-Dravida sepoys gave up their own rice to the British soldiers and survived on "congee water."[38] Adi-Dravida memorials emphasized the enabling conditions of a "British character of administration" needed to ensure "fairness, equal distribution of power, annihilation of all disabilities, tolerance, sympathy with the weak," and amelioration of the condition of the "Depressed Classes."[39]

Rajah attached special significance to the term "Adi-Dravidas," although on some occasions he used the term "Depressed Classes" to allude to these communities in the southern districts (and, by extension, Tamil-speaking districts) of the Madras Presidency. He understood the

36. Q/11/20, no. 788 (December 1923–January 1924), India Office Records (IOR), London.
37. I refer to the following Adi-Dravida memorials: E-Mad 645 IOR/Q/13/1/10; E-Mad 809, IOR/Q/13/1/11; E-Mad 935, IOR/Q/13/1/11.
38. One Adi-Dravida memorial mentions that Adi-Dravidas made this sacrifice especially in the 1751 British siege of Arcot in the second Carnatic war. Q/13/1/9, IOR.
39. Memorandum submitted by M. C. Rajah to the Royal Commission, Q/11/20, M.788 (December 1923–January 1924), IOR. The "Depressed Classes" was a term also used to refer to Dalits and was used by several Dalits, including Babasaheb Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah; however, unlike other terms, its origins were in its colonial administrative usage.

Adi-Andhras to be the Dalit communities in the northern districts or the Telugu-speaking districts of the region.[40]

It is critical to mark another significant historical development alongside moves to signal a new-fangled self-proclamation of a collective identity that was empowering. The Adi-Dravidas did not merely carve out their identities anew; they underscored that it was different from the Dravidas or the backward caste, non-Brahmin communities of the Madras Presidency. This was implicit in the Adi-Dravida claim that they were the original inhabitants of the region. Especially when faced with the political entity formed by dominant non-Brahmin castes (Justice Party) and their lack of support for antiuntouchability laws, Rajah refused to have the Adi-Dravida identity merged with a "composite non-Brahmin persona."[41] This identity was all the more significant to highlight how temperance landscapes were recast spiritually, socially, and politically, even when they evolved within Adi-Dravida social worlds. Before I explore the more distinctive temperance landscapes among the Adi-Dravidas of Madras Presidency, I flag disparate regional usages of this term.

Interestingly, the term "Adi-Dravida" was invoked in another region altogether. In the central Travancore region, Poykayil Yohannan—the leader of a social reform organization and movement, Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS)—used it to include both Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking communities (not all Dalit, but Dalit and other less-marginalized castes) such as the Pulayas, Nadars, Kuravas, Parayas, and Thandas. This leader deliberately invoked the term "Adi-Dravida" to recast their social selves to "rememorialize their past" and leave behind their "slave identities."[42]

His reforms consisted of asking his followers to stop eating red meat and consuming alcohol and betel leaves. It is noteworthy that Yohannan recognized not just the overarching association of these communities with alcohol but also the specific marginalization of backward-caste communities like Nadars and Kuruvas through toddy tapping.

40. Deputation from All-India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha dated 26 February 1929 to the Indian Statutory Commission, MAD 0-10, Q_/13/1/35, IOR.

41. The Justice Party sought to "represent the interests of all non-Brahmins in the Presidency including Muslims, Christians and untouchables"; Arnold, *Congress in Tamilnad*, 19. Sambaiah Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015), 158.

42. Meenakshi Nambiar, "Adi-Dravida Slave Identity: A Historical Analysis of the Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (1910–Present)" (bachelor's honors thesis, Azim Premji University, 2020).

Adi-Dravida Temperance Politics and Discourses of Space

Returning to the distinctive temperance discourses that featured in the political spaces of the legislature and the Adi-Dravida associations in the Madras Presidency, I present a few insights I gained from a close reading of Rajah's speeches in the intensely fraught discussions at the Madras Legislative Council and the Central Legislative Assembly. I paid attention in particular to his statements on temperance and Prohibition wherever I could find them. Not surprisingly, Rajah refused to read these concepts separately from his holistic assessment of untouchability, or what he often termed "caste disabilities" and social discrimination. These discussions were fraught because the Congress members he addressed in these speeches refused to see these organic connections.

It is critical to note that Rajah delivered a distinctive speech on the question of Prohibition on 14 September 1937, soon after the Congress swept its way into power in the elections held to form the government in the Madras Presidency.[43] While congratulating Rajaji on becoming the premier of the Madras Presidency and applauding their plans to introduce Prohibition, he pinpointed a few things. He wished to draw attention to how he had called for Prohibition much earlier—as early as 1917—and that, in 1920, he had moved a resolution in the Madras Legislative Council asking that the government close down toddy and liquor shops. In pointing this out, Rajah spoke specifically of how Prohibition was needed to protect the Depressed Classes and "labourers proceeding to or coming from centres of labour" to conveniently adjacent liquor shops and how Prohibition cannot be removed from all those socioeconomic disabilities that weighed down Adi-Dravidas—namely, "untouchability" and the oppressions of "money-lending."[44] For Rajah, the two points of denouncing liquor as a source of excise revenue and introducing Prohibition were primarily correlated to the well-being of laborers at risk from unhealthy temptations in their direct line of sight.

He also marked out his own suggestions regarding Prohibition as distinctive from those of the Congress in other ways. He called for Prohibition to be started all over the presidency, not just in a less prominent town like Salem—where Rajaji and the TNCC had commenced their Prohibitionist experiments—but to be boldly implemented in Madras city as an

43. M. C. Rajah, "Provincial Excise" (14 September 1937) in *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M. C. Rajah*, ed. Swaraj Basu (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 276–77.
44. Rajah, "Provincial Excise," 277.

"experiment" to usher it in throughout the Presidency. In this same speech, he urged bolder steps to slash the number of shops by half or one-third by the time the next budget was passed and the rest to be dealt with soon after. While urging the government to not worry too much about the revenue deficit that could result from introducing Prohibition, he suggested alternatives to laborers, Depressed Classes, and others "accustomed to drink." He fleshed out an alternative imagination of what he called "drinking restaurants," where a "sort of rice conjee with sambhar and sharp pickles could be sold cheap. At the start, by way of democracy, they should be doled out free" by local bodies assisted by the government.[45] Thus, he placed suggestions on the table that could go into the Prohibition bill that the new Congress government was mulling.

While exhorting the Congress with his own suggestions, Rajah never ceased to couple Prohibition with social disabilities that Adi-Dravidas faced and, subsequently, found many occasions to decry Rajaji's government for sequestering these two things. In his other speeches, he expressed anguish at Rajaji and the TNCC for failing to support the civil disabilities bill—which, among other things, paved the way for temple access to Adi-Dravidas and had its precursor in the Temple Entry Bill of 1933—that he was keen to have the Madras Legislative Assembly pass.

Rajah accused Rajaji of having double standards when the latter asked Rajah to either confine the civil disabilities bill to the region of Malabar—ostensibly because Rajaji saw civil disabilities to be unsurmountable except through a legislation like this—or withdraw the bill. When Rajaji cited the absence of local public opinion in favor of such a bill, Rajah pointed out that he had spent the past 20 years consolidating this opinion. Besides, he stated, Rajaji did not care that there was an absence of such public opinion when he sought to introduce Prohibition in district after district.[46]

On another, earlier occasion, Rajah chastised Gandhi and "his followers" for prioritizing Prohibition and Khaddar (homespun clothing) over "the removal of untouchability," so much so that it felt like they had not devoted even a hundredth of attention to the latter compared with

45. Rajah, "Provincial Excise." Sambhar is a lentil soup mixed with rice.

46. M. C. Rajah, "A Bill to Provide for the Removal of Civil Disabilities among Certain Classes of Hindus" (17 August 1938) in *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M. C. Rajah*, ed. Swaraj Basu (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 287.

the former.[47] In all these ways, he called out various Congress figures for their caste-blind animus to usher in Prohibition while ignoring everything else. Interestingly, Rajah's excoriation of the Congress for prioritizing alcohol regulation over the purging of untouchability also featured in Babasaheb Ambedkar's own writings.

Ambedkar was a famous lawyer, economist, and Dalit leader and icon who fought for the annihilation of caste, and he became the first law minister of independent India. He pinpointed the insidiousness of the Congress borrowing the language of "local option" as salient to temperance reform and likened the local option in drinking-regulation spheres to local option in temple entry—he asked, does this not reduce untouchability's evil to just the same kind of evil that drinking conjured?[48]

All this said, the Adi-Dravidas were intensely invested in temperance across various associational and social reformist spaces; here, I am not referring merely to Rajah's own formulations. Across motley and disparate social reform efforts led by the Adi-Dravidas of the Madras Presidency and those who went by this appellation in Kerala, and even the Adi-Dravidas in British Malaya, the leitmotif of renouncing alcohol was present. This is not to say that other non-Brahmin communities did not practice temperance. They did, but the qualitative difference was this: While non-Brahmin communities, such as the Gounders in Coimbatore and Devanga Chettis in Salem joined the TNCC in picketing liquor shops and auctions to enhance their caste status, Adi-Dravidas endorsed temperance in their autonomous associational spaces to overlay temperance with religious and secular commitments to rid themselves of all stigmas of untouchability.[49]

47. M. C. Rajah, "Speech of M. C. Rajah at the All India Depressed Classes' Conference" (31 October 1931) in *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M. C. Rajah*, ed. Swaraj Basu (Delhi: Manohar, 2012), 118.

48. Local options in domains of alcohol regulation—depending on where this option was exercised—involved local boards, councils, or counties voting to either adopt or avoid Prohibition. Babasaheb Ambedkar, "Statement on Temple Entry Bill 14th February 1933," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, ed. Hari Narake, M. L. Kasare, N. G. Kamble, and Ashok Godghate, vol. 17, pt. 1 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 197.

49. T. Thankappan, "Congress and the Prohibition Movement in the Madras Presidency," *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 89, no. 1 (1998): 27–28; Arnold, *Congress in Tamilnad,* 65. Nadars were another community classified as backward caste and who felt the need to distance themselves from being associated with toddy.

A wave of self-reform activity and energetic mobilization swept over Adi-Dravida associations, marked by the creation of journals dedicated to temperance, note sharing, cross-cultural comparisons of battling oppression, and stigmas of meat eating, drinking, and betel nut chewing.

The Adi-Dravidas pioneered journals and disseminated antidrink pamphlets and tracts, some of which advocated abstinence in the Madras Presidency and in places like Rangoon, Jaffna, Singapore, Malaya, Colombo, and Myanmar.[50] Jagannatha Swami was an Adi-Dravida leader in the Madras Presidency who asked his followers among the laborers to refrain from drinking alcohol alongside small acts of rebellion against agricultural landlords such as the refusal to prostrate.[51] Both the historians Chinnaiah Jangam and Sambaiah Gundimeda underscored the importance of seeing these self-reform movements also in the light of how Dalit leaders were indisputably involved in making nationalist modernity. Rajah's formulations linking Prohibition and untouchability were of a piece with his social emancipatory commitments.

While these developments situated Adi-Dravida within nationalist politics and regional discourses, it is important to note critical differences among Adi-Dravida figures. Key differences reared themselves within the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. A reformist Adi-Dravida leader and member of the Legislative Council like Swami Sahajananda sought to instill values of "cleanliness, sanitation and religious devotion among the untouchable communities" and wanted Dalits to access upper-caste Hindu resources such as the scriptures, especially Saiva Siddhanta, and Sanskrit.[52] He asked them to refrain from eating beef and drinking alcohol to place them on par with upper castes. In comparison, Rajah and many other Adi-Dravida associations from Ramnad, Chittoor, Tinnevelly, and other districts rendered questions of temperance important but secondary to Adi-Dravida representation within local and regional bodies.

50. Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed," 44; S. Arasaratnam, "Social Reform and Reformist Pressure Groups among the Indians of Malaya and Singapore 1930–1955," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 40, no. 2 (December 1967): 54–67.

51. Raj Sekhar Basu, "The Making of Adi Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu," *Social Scientist* 39, no. 7–8 (2011): 32; B. Kolappan, "Memorial for Dalit Spiritual Leader, Swami Sahajananda to Come Up," *The Hindu*, 16 May 2013.

52. Basu, "Making of Adi-Dravida Politics," 32.

Diasporic Adi-Dravidas from the Madras Presidency, as members of labor unions and associations in colonial Singapore and Malaya, simultaneously made great strides in introducing temperance on rubber and coconut plantations through pamphlets, periodicals, picketing of toddy shops, and adult classes.[53] One Adi-Dravida memorial takes up the question of drink and asks for a complete ban on toddy tapping.[54] The Adi-Dravidas of Kuala Lumpur who submitted this memorial narrated, on a joyous note, that they found freedom in British Malaya where caste prejudices, for the most part, do not exist.[55] They were, however, keen to make their voices count and to present proposals to the Simon Commission, believing that this would alleviate the unabating caste discrimination in British India and the Madras Presidency in particular.

Interestingly, the same memorial made a summary demand for abolishing caste *panchayats*—local bodies notorious for their casteist fiats against intermarriage and interdining—a space that Congress picketers enthusiastically used to cement their calls for boycotting liquor shops.[56] Whatever the reformist, temperance, and even Prohibitionist zeal among Adi-Dravidas, none of the pamphlets, memorials, and writings by community leaders cherish the possibility of joining the Congress in picketing toddy shops within the Madras Presidency. Implicit in this conspicuous absence is the implacable conviction that any and all government and legislative decisions involving Prohibition helmed by a high caste or even a dominant non-Brahmin leader would violently marginalize Adi-Dravidas.

In addition to the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, the Suthesa Madhu Vilakku Sangam (Native Society for Alcohol Prohibition) was devoted to

53. Parameswari Krishnan, Azharudin Mohd Dali, Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali and Shritharan Subramanian, "The History of Toddy Drinking and Its Effects on Indian Laborers in Colonial Malaya, 1900–1957," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 3–4 (2014): 321–82; Arasaratnam, "Social Reform and Reformist Pressure Groups"; Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed."

54. E-Mad 809, Q/13/1/11, IOR dated 25 November 1928.

55. This is not necessarily indicative of the experiences of Adi-Dravidas in other international locations; Adi-Dravidas in Ceylon, for instance, bitterly complained of discrimination at the hands of dominant castes such as the Vellalars. Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed," 43.

56. Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed." Not all historical accounts resonate with this description of caste as having disappeared in colonial Malaya.

discussing temperance issues among the Adi-Dravidas.[57] Temperance as expressed in Adi-Dravida associational spaces was performatively and symbolically at a great remove from the Congress picketers' methods of caste discrimination. Seen historically, Dalit struggles across the nineteenth century in both the Madras Presidency and the princely states of Cochin and Travancore entailed carefully calibrated "radical mobilizations" to claim social space and to reclaim the Adi-Dravida body.

This social space took the form of both an ascendant associational politics and the assertion of Dalit rights in schools, roads, temples, and legislatures. In their disparate associations and conferences, members of the PRDS and the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha issued calls for the Adi-Dravida body to be purged of alcohol to align it with a spiritually and politically regenerated self.

Adi-Dravidas in the Madras Presidency as well as Kerala also deliberately flouted "the code of spatial control and discipline that existed for centuries," exercised through the segregation and caste-based policing of access to public spaces.[58] Examples of this were multifold, including demanding entry to temples, schools, tanks, wells, streets, and other public spaces (as Rajah's efforts to pass the civil disabilities bill show). Rajah, however, was not the only Adi-Dravida who strove to demand the unfettering of Adi-Dravidas. Iyothee Thass, Swami Sahajananda, and Rettaimalai Srinivasan were other Adi-Dravidas who strove endlessly to gain access to public spaces, especially temples and schools. Swami Sahajananda applied for the allotment of government wasteland for a school he started—an application that was initially turned down by "subordinate Government Revenue Officials."[59] In contrast, Rettaimalai Srinivasan argued the irony of the Depressed Classes—a term he preferred to Adi-Dravidas—pleading with their upper-caste counterparts to secure temple entry access when they were the original owners of temples such as the Jambukeswara and the Mariamman temple, as attested by local myths.[60]

As I demonstrated, Adi-Dravida spaces were also manifest as associations and literary spaces that had come into their own with robust

57. J. Balasubramaniam, "Dalit Journals in Colonial Madras (1869–1943)," *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, no. 42 (2020): 34–39.

58. Mohan, "Social Space," 83.

59. Rajah, "Oppressed Hindus," 38.

60. V. Aruna, "Role of Rettaimalai Srinivasan in the Temple Entry Movement," *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* 5, no. 4 (December 2018): 472–75.

overseas connections and sharing of notes with each other on caste discrimination and temperance.[61] This presence is manifest especially in the efflorescence of mutually reinforcing Adi-Dravida journals such as *Adi-Dravidan*, *Madras Adi-Dravidan, Colombo Adi-Dravidan*, and *Adi-Dravida Padukavalan* in Ceylon and the Madras Presidency. While temperance featured in the other journals, J. Balasubramaniam writes that one journal published from Colombo was devoted to the subject (i.e., *Madhu Velaku Dutan*).

Drawing on Sanal Mohan, all these spatial assertions—the ones by Adi-Dravidas to wrest public space from the privileged castes, those to launch temperance through associational spaces, and especially those that saw temperance as bound up with the project to banish untouchability—were nothing short of a "Dalit conversion to modernity."[62] Among these Dalit spatial assertions, Adi-Dravidas assumed distinctive spiritual roles of counterpublics, both inside and outside mainstream Christianity.[63] Spiritual leaders like Swami Sahajananda and Yohannan sought to banish alcohol from Dalit homes and workplaces to bring their bodies in touch with the "Dravidian God."[64] Dalit demands for removing untouchability from public spaces cannot be removed from Dalit moves to reclaim their bodies from what they regarded as the taint of alcoholism.

In this, Adi-Dravida denunciations of drink were akin to those by Babasaheb Ambedkar, who sought to erase this habit among Dalits on account of its demoralizing and stigmatizing effects. While he asked Dalit women, men, and children to stop drinking, he simultaneously warned Congress politicians to stop equating the drink evil with untouchability. Such an act only rendered the eradication of untouchability insignificant

61. Balasubramaniam, "Migration of the Oppressed," 43–45.

62. Sanal Mohan, "Creation of Social Space through Prayers among Dalits in Kerala, India," *Journal of Religioius and Political Practice* 2, no. 1 (2016): 40–57, 51.

63. The term "counterpublic" has featured across several theoretical writings on the public sphere. Dalit political theorists, particularly K. Satyanarayana, deployed the idea of counterpublics to illustrate oppositional rights struggles in which resisting violence (in this instance, caste violence) is the constitutive domain of linguistic communication, community, and nation formation. K. Satyanarayana, "The Dalit Reconfiguration of Modernity: Citizens and Castes in the Telugu Public Sphere," in *Dalit Studies*, ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 155–79; Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*; Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India*.

64. Nambiar, "Adi-Dravida Slave Identity."

while elevating the antidrink agenda.[65] While it is not clear if Ambedkar's pronouncements had a direct influence, a summary denunciation of drink was common to many self-reform agendas of Adi-Dravida associations and leaders, who sought to purge it from their collective social memory.

Historical Contingencies and Historiographical Implications of Caste's Encounter with Alcohol

It is against this backdrop of Adi-Dravida regional constructions of their subjectivities that I analyze the implications of the incident narrated at the beginning of the article. I ask, what were the implications of associating toddy with the body of the Adi-Dravida woman? I use the term "implications" to foreground the historical meanings that were unleashed in the 1930s and the historiographical challenges of these associations as far as alcohol studies and the social history of alcohol are concerned.

To understand the implications of the casteist and gendered language behind the slur by the Congress picketers where they likened toddy to the "menses" or menstrual blood of the Adi-Dravida woman, I turn to Dalit historiography to furnish critical answers.[66] Dalit writings on caste and menstruation have gestured to how upper-caste women suffer

65. Ambedkar, "Statement on Temple Entry Bill," 197; "Scheduled Caste's Emancipation—Draft Manifesto," *Times of India*, 3 October 1951, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, ed. Hari Narake, M. L. Kasare, N. G. Kamble, and Ashok Godghate, vol. 17, pt. 1 (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014), 398.

66. Dalit historiographical and literary writings are illuminating in their sheer canvas of mapping regionally situated historical struggles in terms of both public space and intersectionality. These are framed as fighting "the slave experience," "social movement invested in the battle against injustice," a rejection of "humiliation" but also a struggle to be recognized as artists and landowners and not merely field laborers and *joginis* (a form of sexualized caste labor). See P. Sanal Mohan, *The Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, "Dalit Writing: An Introduction," in *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, ed. K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013), 7; Gopal Guru, ed., *Humiliation: Claims and Context* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Gogu Shyamala, *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But . . .* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2020). In a gendered sense, autobiographies by Dalit women trace a complex narrative arc of protesting against the diverse loci of caste across rural, urban, and mofussil spaces; multifaith places of worship; and historically embedded sexual violence in the name of ritual. See Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holström (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, eds., *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2008).

temporary untouchability as they experience segregation; restrictions against touching crops, pickles, and curd; and lapse of ritual purity during this period.[67] However, menstruating Dalit women (and in this case, Adi-Dravida women) have no such claim to "ritual purity and self-respect," either temporary or enduring.[68] Sowjanya writes that, if anything, upper-caste traditions entailed Dalit washerwomen and men receiving the blood-stained clothes of the upper-caste women. Scholars have foregrounded the intensity of the discrimination: Dalit women cannot ask anybody to clean their blood, nor can their work—whether it involves agriculture, washing, or selling toddy—be placed on hiatus on account of their menstrual cycle. In Sowjanya's words, "since Dalits and lower castes do not possess purity of caste or sexuality, their menstruation is not a taboo according to the Brahminical patriarchy."[69] If this is the case, then why would Congress picketers resort to a caste slur that would imply that the menstrual blood of the Adi-Dravida woman was imbued with the worst form of impurity?

It is imperative to look at temporally and spatially contingent historical configurations of Congress picketers' own relations with Adi-Dravidas and the former's imagination of the latter in the Congress-driven temperance movement. I return now to my discussion of how Adi-Dravida figured as a symbol of untouchability in the TNCC's strategies of targeting physical and social spaces of alcohol. Although the Congress's picketing strategy was to block entrances of toddy shops, by no means did this exhaust the repertoire of tactics and sites of the Congress antidrink campaign.

The spatial scale of the antiliquor movement was wide-ranging, with the net cast far and wide. In its war against the "drink traffic," the TNCC carried out raids on renters' or drink-shop licensees' homes and pickets of toddy and arrack shops, liquor auctions, and what the TNCC deemed "illegal" liquor sales. TNCC workers held meetings in "central places" and "street corners" to plan strategies on a war footing.[70]

67. Deepthi Sukumar, "Personal Narrative: Caste Is My Period," in *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, ed. Chris Bobel, Inga T. Winkler, Breanne Fahs, Katie Ann Hasson, Elizabeth Arveda Kissling, and Tomi-Ann Roberts (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 137–42; T. Sowjanya, "Critique on Contemporary Debates on Menstrual Taboo in India: Through Caste Lens," *Pramana Research Journal* 9, no. 8 (2019): 253–58.

68. Sowjanya, "Critique on Contemporary Debates," 254.

69. Sowjanya, 257.

70. Press clipping, newspaper unknown, 18 March 1931, Rajaji Papers, installment 4, subject file 11, NMML.

In many of these sites, Rajaji and the TNCC consistently saw toddy as polluting of bodies and objects and expanded its meanings to encompass the various things and people that they associated with its sale, distribution, and consumption. Toddy came to be irrevocably tied to toddy-tapping trees and places where it was sold and to the body of the Adi-Dravida woman. Without a larger narrative of caste pollution that associated objects and bodies with toddy, its conflation with the Adi-Dravida woman could not have emerged.

In this regard, it is critical to note that Rajaji made an impassioned plea against what he deemed mercenary habits among temples to lease out coconut trees for toddy tapping. His immediate object of ire was the Parthasarathy temple in the Triplicane area in Madras city. The metaphors he used to denigrate these temple practices were coated with allusions to caste purity. While condemning this practice, he said in his address to the temple folk, "This ancient temple was intended for a civilized form of worship; but you have converted this into something like those temples where goats and fowls are slaughtered."[71]

To analyze this association of toddy with polluted objects—and thus something that temples should abhor—I draw on the insights of the scholar Aniket Jaaware, who theorizes the many ways in which touch-based regulations around "things" work. He cites instances in which Brahmin musicians cannot play percussion instruments because they are made of leather, "the skin of dead goats, cows, buffalo and camel."[72] He notes that sometimes this can work in terms of fear of the imprints and traces of untouchability that even shadows, for instance, can leave.

To take Jaaware's argument further, spaces where "untouchable" persons and objects proliferate are also themselves seen as untouchable. Within the strategies fashioned by the Congress in concert with other actors, it is critical to note that the Adi-Dravida woman was not just accorded a special place in their hall of shame. Her body carried fearsome specters of caste on account of her community's association with toddy tapping and consumption.

Adi-Dravida women figured in the Rajaji papers as sellers of vegetables and fruit—as the reference to such a woman in the Ranipet picketing story indicates—who were at times gullible and, at other times, willing

71. Press clipping, newspaper unknown, 18 March 1931.

72. Aniket Jaaware, *Practicing Caste: On Touching and Not Touching* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019), 156.

agents of unscrupulous renters. Rajaji wrote in 1931 about the need to prevent Congress leaders from taking initiatives such as the boycott of Adi-Dravida women vegetable vendors who were suspected of spending their earnings on drink.[73] These actions targeting Adi-Dravida women were only justified by Congress narratives such as this one: they found a woman—likely Adi-Dravida, as she is cited as one of many women who could sell toddy in public owing to their "extremely low social status"—guilty of selling 1.5 measures of toddy so that she could reclaim her jewelry, which she pawned to a toddy shop owner who struck this deal with her.[74] The Congress volunteers promptly handed over this woman to the *Abkari* (excise) inspector. Incidents such as this only fortified social biases against Adi-Dravida women in different parts of the Madras Presidency.

As mentioned, Congress picketers threatened to burn down Adi-Dravida homes in the rural parts of Thanjavur in the Madras Presidency. These moves were guided by convictions that "Adi-Dravidas were the chief consumer of toddy liquor."[75] Such threats, although they may not have been implemented in this instance, were delivered at other sites of casteist hatred (though not liquor-related) against Adi-Dravidas and their acts of political mobilization.[76] A mob chanted *Gandhiji-ki-jai* while setting Adi-Dravida homes on fire in July 1921 within the context of labor strikes at Buckingham and Carnatic mills, where Adi-Dravida workers broke ranks with upper-caste Hindus and Muslim laborers and returned to work.

To return to the critical event of toddy being likened to the blood of the Adi-Dravida woman in Ranipet, I argue that a certain physical designation of the space outside the toddy shop was rendered into a socially volatile one marked by caste humiliation. Gopal Guru writes about humiliation as the constellation of "multiple stigmatized images which make him/her untouchable"—such a Dalit body can also be cast as "a poisoned weapon" that creates endless "anxiety" among her upper-caste

73. Rajaji, "Illegal Sales: A Narrow Escape," cited in Colvard, "World without Drink," 239.
74. Colvard, "World without Drink," 242–44.
75. P. Kumar, "The Congress, Self-Respecters, and the Anti-untouchability Campaign in Later Tamil Nadu," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 77 (2016): 575.
76. Arnold, *Congress in Tamilnad*, 70; see also, Basu, "Making of Adi Dravida Politics," 25. It was the British authorities under Governor Willingdon who evacuated them and enabled their safe passage to relief camps.

"tormentors."[77] Toddy was imbued with all the poisoned ingredients of the bodily secretions of Dalit women perceived to be vectors of social impurity.

It is only in taking stock of this background that one can begin to understand why Adi-Dravida menstrual blood became a slur even when, as Dalit feminist scholarship correctly points out, such women could claim no stake in ritual pollution within menstruating worlds. Whether or not Congress picketers attached any sociocultural significance to menstruating Adi-Dravida women, the invocation of their menstrual blood showed that the buying, selling, and consuming of toddy was regarded as being as untouchable as the bodies of Adi-Dravida women. They labeled Adi-Dravidas as polluted agents of drink in an intemperate society. This image helped conjure disgust for drinkers at the cost of the dignity and self-respect of the Adi-Dravida woman.

I conclude this section with a call to historiographically recast temperance in Madras Presidency and South India in the early twentieth century to align it with the history and historiography of caste in South India. Mainstream historiography studying the Indian national movement has taken note of how caste discrimination, as a political strategy, entered the swadeshi and civil disobedience movements, especially in the form of social boycotts driven by caste panchayats.[78] However, such historiography has not, with any rigor, attended to the Congress-propelled temperance movement as the site of virulent caste articulations and violence.[79] In this regard, it must be noted that while Dalit communities also formed caste panchayats that focused on temperance, the use of caste panchayats to punish drinkers and those who

77. Guru, *Humiliation*, 14.

78. The swadeshi movement referred to the nationalist movement for self-sufficiency and self-rule in the early part of the twentieth century and called for the ban of foreign goods and liquor.

79. The question of caste has not been absent altogether in alcohol studies sited in India and overseas and features in Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1969); Colvard, "World without Drink"; Lucy Carroll, "The Temperance Movement in India: Politics and Social Reform," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 417–47; Dilip Menon, "From Pleasure to Taboo: Drinking and Society in Kerala," *India International Centre Quarterly* 22, no. 2–3 (1995): 143–56; John Solomon, *A Subaltern History of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore: Gradual Disappearance of Untouchability 1872–1965* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016). However, a rigorous evaluation of caste discrimination as propelling temperance agitations has not been undertaken.

patronized drink had powerful backers prominently among various Congress committees.[80]

Scholarship in alcohol studies has usually foregrounded only Congress as pioneering the temperance agitation in these parts, which leaves two things unattended: first, the endeavor of recognizing the virulent caste discrimination that gave an edge to Congress's temperance agitation; and second, the critical task of recognizing sacred and secular realms of temperance reform as also driven by one of the most marginalized sections in the region. Dalit mobilizations under not just the figure of the Adi-Dravidas but also Adi-Andhras in both Madras Presidency and a neighboring region, the Hyderabad state, also flagged temperance as a site of collective self-making.

Jangam and Gundimeda have especially foregrounded the work of several Adi-Andhra and Telugu Dalit historical icons, such as Bhagya Reddy Varma, Jala Rangaswamy, Kusuma Dharmanna, and Srirayudu Gangaiah, who wrote in multiple cultural, medical, and political registers about temperance. Jangam and Gundimeda have considered this temperance work within the tracts and the journals that these leaders pioneered and thus assigned it an unmistakable place in recasting the Dalit self.[81] Among the Adi-Andhras, too, the reform movement included anti-drinking tracts, hymns, and pamphlets, although in this instance too, these genres and the leaders who used them sought to ensure "equality and respect from caste Hindus."[82] Although this movement has found significant mention, these temperance movements of the marginalized require in-depth historical and historiographical inquiry. Moreover, alcohol studies need to historically consider the caste question of how Dalit and Congress figures imagined each other and manifested in each other's sociopolitical spaces.

80. Ramnarayan S. Rawat, "Struggle for Identities, Chamar Histories, and Politics," in *Caste in Modern India*, ed. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, vol. 1 (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014), 1040–41; Arnold, *Congress in Tamilnad*; Rajaji papers, installment 4, subject file 11.

81. Among the notable tracts that Adi-Andhra leaders wrote was Kusuma Dharmanna, *Madhyapana Nishedhamu* (1930; Vijayawada: Prajashakti, 2016). Jala Rangaswamy and Jala Mangamma were also Adi-Andhras who undertook temperance activism in the form of singing hymns that denounced alcohol consumption. Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India*, 113–14, 149–50. Also see this article, "Kallu Traguta Manitimi" [We stopped drinking toddy], *Andhra Patrika*, 23 November 1929, which discusses the efforts by Adi-Andhra leader Srirayudu Gangaiah among Adi-Andhra communities in West Godavari district.

82. Gundimeda, *Dalit Politics in Contemporary India*, 163.

Conclusion

It is common knowledge that the Rajaji-led Congress movement against liquor yielded policy returns in the long term. In the 1930s, picketing resumed its vigor, and the masses who attended Congress addresses were required to take vows in the name of their temple deity to abjure from consuming alcohol in any form.[83] These practices prepared a district like Salem to inaugurate the Prohibition policy that the new Congress government implemented as soon as it came to power in 1937. The Congress government took office within the framework of provincial autonomy introduced by the Government of India Act (1935).

Apart from consolidating a moral consensus against alcohol, a legal and policy-backed prohibitionist stance took root when the Congress strode into office with Rajaji as premier. The new government sunk its teeth into the existing drink trade by ushering in Prohibition in four districts of the Madras Presidency. Salem, Rajaji's birthplace, was the first district to see the introduction of Prohibition in 1937, followed by Chittoor and Cuddappah districts in October 1938 and North Arcot district in October 1939.

Despite despairing entreaties by the governor of Madras to the Viceroy of India to discontinue Prohibition on many grounds and the Madras Excise Administration Report (1940–41) reporting a massive increase in excise crimes in these four districts following its implementation, Prohibition continued to be enforced for the longest time in the region.[84] The viceroy and the secretary of state concurred in allowing the discontinuation of Prohibition in regions like United Provinces and Bihar but retaining it in the Madras Presidency in deference to what they termed the "political aspect" of the agitation.

Congress imagery of Adi-Dravidas is reinforced in the Madras excise report, which prominently names them in citing an increase in excise

83. Krishnan et al., "History of Toddy Drinking," 321–82, 369.

84. Writing in December 1942, the governor wrote to the Viceroy of India that in the years between 1938 and 1942, the number of crimes increased by 200% compared with an increase of 20% in the rest of the provinces. He also argued that Prohibition, if repealed, would result in an excise revenue estimated at 65 lakh per year, which would be useful to combat inflation; besides, there was a sizeable increase in "the additional expenditure" on police service on account of having to fight crimes against Prohibition. Governor of Madras to Viceroy of India, L/E/9/836, IOR.

crimes in all four districts.[85] Adi-Dravidas, and "Chucklers" among them, figured along with Goundars as the communities primarily responsible for illicit distillation of arrack in North Arcot district. "Chucklers" is the Anglicized name for the Adi-Dravida and Dalit community, Chakkiliyans. The excise report mentioned the cultivation of the *avaram* plant or the *senna auriculata* as their principal occupation and illicit arrack preparation as a secondary occupation.[86]

A figure like Ambedkar was quite aware of the implications of texts such as the excise report in the Madras Presidency, even though I cannot say that he had read this one. He held Prohibitionist policies responsible for pushing drink underground and producing stigmatizing effects. Although he wished to purge drink among Dalits, he did not mince words in terming Prohibition "sheer madness," the progress of which must be "arrested" at once. He argued that Prohibition turned the "manufacture of liquor" into a "cottage industry" and that it readily spawned crimes. He indicated that it could push "the lower classes" into an abyss of "demoralisation" and further stigma.[87] These remarks are particularly pertinent when read in the context of potentially many other official writings that prominently named Adi-Dravidas.

On another note, if Rajaji produced policy insights against drink, he was not the only one to do so. Rajah, in his capacity as a prolific Adi-Dravida leader and legislator, presented his carefully formulated ideas in the Madras Legislative Council on selected occasions and decried Rajaji's and Congress's reified understandings of Prohibition shorn of all social commitments against untouchability. In so doing, he took a stance disparate from the pan-national Dalit voice of Babasaheb Ambedkar. While both Rajah and Ambedkar agreed that any question about the evil of drinking could not be separated from the more critical questions of addressing untouchability and allied poverty and social exile, Rajah endorsed Prohibition while Ambedkar did not.

85. Governor of Madras to Viceroy of India, L/E/9/836, IOR. This excise report also traced the rise in illicit distillation to the following: rich influential ryots aided by their servants in Cuddappah district, the simplicity and affordability in the process of manufacturing "illicit arrack," and increasing incidence of local crude preparations by the "sugalies." This is a disparaging name used to refer, in this instance, to the Lambada tribal community in Chittoor district.

86. Governor of Madras to Viceroy of India, L/E/9/836, IOR.

87. Ambedkar, "Scheduled Caste's Emancipation," 398.

Adi-Dravidas were not alone in being marked as agents of a perverse drinking trade; other non-Brahmin communities also figure. However, the marginalization of Adi-Dravidas occurred at multiple scales and spaces—for example, in picketing landscapes, in their homes, and in excise reports—marked by varying intensities of caste hatred. This marginalization occurred not merely on account of alcohol but also on account of the coupling of toddy specters with others such as the menstruating Adi-Dravida woman (whose impurity was regarded to be sufficient to invoke disgust from the most hardened addict). It occurred principally on account of a gendered and casteist hatred that was deliberately baked into picketing methods and spaces.

TNCC picketing, C. Rajagopalachari, and antiliquor agitations figure predominantly in official excise reports and state writing, which sometimes grudgingly and at other times glowingly credited them with the temperance zeal critical to inaugurating Prohibition in these areas. The reformist zeal among Adi-Dravidas such as Jagannatha Swami and Swami Sahajananda, as well as Adi-Andhras such as Bhagya Reddy Varma, Kusuma Dharmanna and Jala Rangaswamy, and the prescriptive aversion to alcohol professed by these leaders and their allied associations do not figure anywhere as catalysts for temperance among these communities or a reduced drink trade.

As Jangam avers, it is this conspicuous erasure of Dalit contributions to both regional and nationalist modernities that historians must now attempt to correct. In his analysis, the nation presented itself differently when its memories were drawn from "ethical and egalitarian values" and Dalit struggles for social emancipation than when they were harvested from upper-caste elites' spiritual emancipation.[88] Along with rejecting the "all-encompassing ideology of nationalism," it is also critical that historians in alcohol studies and those studying national and social movements carry out two other tasks—namely, identifying the casteist core of nationalist agitations and evaluating Dalit and other nonelite, regional interpretations of "nationalist planks" such as temperance.[89] Without such acts of identifying dissonant strands of Dalit consciousness, historians risk subsuming such discourses into nationalist movements propelled by a singular upper-caste agency.

88. Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India*, 172–73.
89. Jangam, 173.

While acknowledging these critical discursive aspects, I also emphasize how picketing spaces were not the only spatial locations of antiliquor agitation. A spatial politics of alcohol was manifest in street theater, resolutions, memoranda, and agendas of Adi-Dravida and Adi-Andhra associations, many of which powerfully condemned Congress methods and politics.