

CHATTAMBI SWAMIKAL: A GREAT SOCIAL REFORMER AND LITERARY GENIUS PAR EXCELLENCE

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Abstract : Kerala produced many great social reformers and literary scholars. Chattambi Swami was one of the leading figures among them. He had a unique personality. He was the pioneer of Kerala renaissance and reformation movement. He was a great yogi too. He studied the Vedas and yogic texts with a child like curiosity and openness of mind. He was innately blessed with two qualities. He made revolutionary attempts to explain Vedic theories to ordinary people in a simple language and thereby to free them from the darkness of ignorance. He was a great visionary and Strived hard to liberate Kerala society from the grips of caste system and social injustice. This paper attempts to analyze the role of Chattambi Swamikal to liberate Kerala society from its social disabilities and contributions to enrich Kerala literary scenario.

Index Terms - Renaissance, Reformation, Revolution, Genius, Scenario, Wisdom, Crusader

INTRODUCTION

Renaissance and Reformation in 19th century are two great movements that transformed Kerala the society .During the second half of the 19th century, Kerala society was awakened from its age long slumber by the activities of various social reformers. Chattambi Swamikal, one of the pioneers of Kerala renaissance, interfered in social problems with spiritual wisdom. He also tried to eradicate social, economic and political exploitation in Kerala society. This paper clearly analyses the role and influence of Chattambi Swamikal in the awakening of Kerala society.

The renaissance of Kerala will be inconceivable for one living in the present set up. The inhuman, caste based feudalistic political system of the nineteenth century made Swami Vivekanada to call Kerala an asylum of lunatics. Chattambi Swami started his work in a feudal society characterized by inequality of the most obnoxious kind .The vast majority of people were helpless victims of social, economic and political exploitation. He recognized the need to dismantle the wicked social order. Swami was the pioneer of renaissance and reformation in Kerala .He initiated movements for social and religious reforms that later successfully weeded out the age old caste based hierarchical social structures in Kerala.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION OF CHATTAMPI SWAMIKAL

Chattampi Swami was born on 25th August 1883 at kollur, a suburban village of Trivandrum. His father was an impecunious Brahmin Vasudeva Sharma from Mavelikara and mother Nagamma a lady from kollur. Though he was named Ayyappan, he was later known as Kunjan. He had no means of attending a school. He learned Malayalam alphabet from his father. In the evenings he used to refer to the books of boys who attended the village school thus learned to read Malayalam and Tamil. Kunjan made his daily habit to overhear the lessons which a Sanskrit teacher taught the Brahmin boys of the madom. Teacher knew his attempts and he was impressed with Kunjan and allowed him to attend his classes. Thus Kunjan achieved considerable proficiency in Sanskrit. Later this Sanskrit knowledge had enabled him to undertake a deep study of Vedas. His thirst for knowledge and his aptitude for study prompted one of his relative to send him to a school ran by Raman Pillai Asan in Pettai near Thiruvananthapuram. Here he won the good will and confidence of his teacher so that he was made chattambi or the monitor who in the absence of teacher took his place. This appellation stuck to him and even today he is known by it.

It was also during this period that Kunjan Pillai showed openly his utter disregard for the inhibitions of casteism. He was also a master in Arts like music, Kathakali and painting. Swamiji belonged to an age in which any one might study astrology, Ayurveda and magic but veda, vedanta and grammar were the close preserve of the higher castes. He believed that every human

being belonged to the same caste .His way of life was in the manner fitting to this thought. Most of his friends belonged to Ezhava caste. He stayed with members of all classes and castes. His expectations in forming a just Hindu society were with Nair Ezhavas groups who formed the majority of population in Kerala. If they join together he believed that all other would join them. Caste feelings would have been disappeared. Swami and guru attempted their best to materialize this dream. He strictly adhered to the virtues of an ideal sage such as ahimsa (non violence), sathya (truthfulness) asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (celibacy) and aparigraha (non acquisition). His endeavor was to re-establish Ahimsa in ahimsa-ridden world. He believed that the state of plenitude of Ahimsa was salvation.

Swamikal travelled extensively in Kerala to eradicate the evil customs and practices rampant in Society. His depth vedantic knowledge helped him much in dispelling the ignorance prevalent among the people. He questioned legitimacy of the supposed supremacy of the upper caste Hindus and strove to cure them of their superstitious belief and customs. He disliked caste system. He stayed and dined with untouchables inviting the wrath of his own orthodox community.

Swamikal is considered the foremost crusader who brought about incredible transformation in the religio-spiritual and socio cultural atmosphere of Kerala. He was guiding star to those who fought to bring about spiritual renaissance and social resurgence in this country. In 1882 Swami Vivekanda met Chattampi Swamikal and talked about chinmudra. Chattampi swami quoted from an old commentary on the brahadaramyaka Upanishad. It was remarkable meeting for both legendry yogis. Vivekanda who was searching for a proper explanation of chinmudra. Chattampi swami quoted from an old commentary on the Brahadarnya Upanishad. Swami Vivekananda was very much impressed with the answer of Chattampi Swami. Swami Vivekanda enlightened thoughts on eradication of social inequalities had a profound impact on Chattampi Swami who was already against such discriminations. It won't be an exaggeration to say that meeting was catalyst for social reform movements in Kerala launched by Chattampi Swami and Sree Narayana Guru.

He taught that middleman was unnecessary between God and man. He and his disciples gave support and encouragement to the movement for opening the temples to all castes. So the soil was not fertile for the sprouting up of reform movements from among the oppressed classes. The only possible solution at that time was a revolt coming up from higher strata of society itself in support of the downtrodden. Chattampi Swamikal did the role perfectly.

Chattampi Swami and his disciples, Sree narayana guru, Neelakanda became a source of inspiration for the later political and social reform movements. Swami through his works destroyed the intellectual base and authority for the Brahmin domination in religious, economic and political spheres. It cleared the path for further progress of Narayana Guru and others. Their life and work influenced the birth of organizations in all the castes. Ezhavas formed Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangam[1903], Namputhuries, the Yogashema Sabha [1908], the fisher men, the Valaya Samudra Parishkarini Sabha [1910] and the Nairs, the Nair Service Society [1914].

During this period women condition became miserable. He worked for the awakening of women and to bring them to forefront of the society through education. Swami worked for making education open to all this was changed lives of lower caste and all caste women in Kerala. He advocated ancient religion and law gave equal statics in to women in society and family. He also stated that misinterpretation of ancient text caused degradation of women position in our society. He worked against obsolete systems of inheritance, child marriage, polygamy and many other outdated customs.

He was a great scholar and he came to known as *Vidyadhiraja*. He travelled miles and miles on foot in search for knowledge. *Vedadikara nirupanam* is considered as one of his greatest works .It refuted the baseless customs and rules that existed in Kerala. For the first time in the history of Kerala that literary work questioning the monopolization of Vedas, sciences and education by a minority. *Vedadikara nirupanam* infused strength and inspiration to the subaltern groups to fight for their right and spread the ideas that led the movements for reformation and renaissance in Kerala.

Swamikal wrote many guides and commentaries on Vedanta for the common man. Among them *Adavidha chintapadahathi* is an excellent manual on adavidha. It was written in simple language to enable ordinary people without knowledge of Sanskrit to learn vedanta. Swami's another book *Christumatha Nirupanam* contains two books namely *Christumatha Saram* and *Christumatha Chethanam*. The first part mentioned what was Christianity. Second parts includes how far the missionaries misinterpreted concepts in the Bible.

His work *Prachinamalayalam* aimed at awakening the mind of the people. The work instilled the people a collective sense and convictions of common origin and belief in a common ancestry. Swami explored the roots of Kerala society and he argued most of the present group in Kerala had common ancestors who were original inhabitants. This work was earliest examples of application of hypothesis and fixed methodology for historical studies. *Prachinamalayalam* and *Vedadikara Nirupanam* of swami were the theoretical weapons that gave strength to the marginalized to fight against the colonial – feudal dominance that existed in Kerala. He was the precursor of many liberal trends. He always extended his hands to those below him to raise them up. His vision of samadarsana (unity) was the outcome of his vedantic knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Infact Chattampi Swamikal was an ever shining star in the history of modern Kerala. His life and works helped Kerala society to make giant leaps by transforming itself and revolutionizing religious and social perspectives. Study of Modern History of Kerala will be incomplete without considering the role of Chattampi Swamikal. He interfered in social problems with spiritual wisdom, with a clear understanding of religion, transcending the caste barriers and unjust customs. He campaigned for eradication of caste barriers and other inequalities from the perspective of Advaitistic insights. His work questioned the supremacy and monopoly of the Brahmins. He always stood for the uplift of the downtrodden people.

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