

MURKKOTH KUMARAN THE THIYYA SOCIAL REFORMER AND MIDDLE CLASS INTELLIGENTSIA FROM NORTH MALABAR

BIJINA M.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
C.A.S COLLEGE MADAYI
KANNUR DISTRICT

Abstract

Murkkoth Kumaran was an eminent literary man and social reformer from North Malabar .He mainly worked for the upliftment of Thiyyas and lower communities of North Malabar. He was a true propagator and follower of Sree Narayana guru's ideology. He used his novel and short stories and articles as a weapon to fight against illegal customs existed in the society. The paper is trying to find out the contributions of Murkkoth kumaran for the upliftment of lower communities of Malabar.

KEYWORDS: Literary activities, Press, Reform Movement

Introduction

The middle class from Thiyya community actively engaged in the journalistic and literary activities. Several journalist and literary man emerged from this community. They used their paper and magazine as a vehicle of social reform and community development activities. The colonial educated middle class and traditional intellectual man involved in the literary and journalistic activities. Several Thiyya leaders have their own press and they used this press as a weapon to fight against illegal customs and other social issues existed in the society.

Murkkoth Kumaran was eminent scholar and literary genius of Northern kerala. He was a teacher, literary man, journalist, social reformer and above all he was an active, intelligent and humanitarian man. He started journalistic activities from 1894 to1941. He dedicated his whole life for engaging journalistic activities even in

the death bed he spend time for writing with the help of his son Murkkot srinivasan¹ He was born in North Malabar at Thalassery town and his father was Ramunni and mother kunchirutha. His father was a well known toddy businessman at North Malabar. Murkkoth kumaran was the son of his father second wife Kunhirutha. His mothers family was well educated family and his grandfather Paithal Gurukkal was famous and efficient teacher and under his control their own *Ezhuthupalli*². He dedicated his whole life for doing social welfare and literary activities. He was a social worker, reformer and teacher and municipal councilor and also great elocutionist and the propagator of Sree Narayanaguru's ideology. Murkkoth Kumaran was one of the early short story writer in Malayalam. His short stories mainly depicted the human deeds and his earnest efforts to aware the society from the traditional caste bondages. His stories always portrayed the human emotions like love ,hatred, vengeance, crookedness, piety, ambition, deception etc in a realistic way³. Realism was the hallmark of Kumaran stories⁴.He always tells that everything in the life that is enjoy or suffer related to their own deeds⁵. He wrote several short stories while he was a student .”*Muthassante kathakal* “was the short story written by murkkoth kumaran, later this story became the text book of Travancore in the twentieth century⁶. He was a well known children's writer of the twentieth century. He has made many contributions to children's literature⁷. He was the editor of several newspapers and Magazine like Mitavadi, Gajakesari, Deepam, Sathyavadi ,Kerala Sanchari, Bashaposhini, Vidayalam etc. He works were written under the different pen names like “*pathanjali, Vajrasooji,Gajakesari*“etc⁸.He wrote several books on prose and poetry style. Murkkoth was the Malayalam teacher in St.Joseph High school Calicut. He was a voracious reader and spends leisure time to literary activities and engaged community development activities. Murkkoth was the editor of kerala Sanchari Malayalam weekly founded by Kesari, while working as editor he wrote humorous article and this article was attracted by O.Chandu menon Sub Judge of south Malabar and the author of Indulekha. O.Chandumenon called for the boy editor and made him his amanuensis for completing the novel. Three

¹ Murkkoth Kunhappa, *Murkkoth kumaran: pathrapravarthanathinte arambham*, Vive book5,issue 6,1971,September kodayam,p-37

² *ezhathupalli* means traditional school

³Sahadevan.M, From Brahmanism to Liberalism, Ideologies, Attitudinal change and Modernity in Kerala, Palakkad,2008,p-200

⁴ Ibid,p.201

⁵ Ibid, p.200

⁶ Murkkoth Kunhappa, *Achante Kathakal*, vivekodayam, Book 6, Issue 4,p-49

⁷ Ibid,p-49

⁸ Arivu smaranika, St.joseph higher secondary school,Thalassery,2003-2004

chapters added to that incomplete novel in subsequent edition were the result of the persuasive article from the pen of Mr.Kumaran⁹.

Later he became the author of several articles and novels etc. He was an author of originality, versatility and, above all humour. Murkkoth's first novel was *Lokapavadam*, appeared in *Bashaposhini* this magazine was the organ of literary star of the time published from Travancore.¹⁰ Next he wrote *Ambu nair*, a very funny and original story of postman. In this novel he criticized the over addiction and imitations of western style and customs¹¹. Mr.Kumaran's master-piece, however is his novel entitled *Vasumathi*, in which the characters are full of life and the events quite modern, recalling to malayalis who have read English novels the thrill afforded by pickwick papers. All his works are those of man more erudite in English than Sanskrit¹². The novel *vasumathi* clearly depicted the social life of north Malabar and criticized polygamy and matrilineal system.

Mr.kumaran has given to literature a translation in to Malayalam of an Indian story of the mughal period,entitled *jahanira* and another from the romance of Indian history, the *Rajaputra vivaham*,besides a metrical version of keats *Isabella*. He has written story for children in the name of *Saralas Box*. Murkkoth remembered by the malayalis as the pioneer of short story teller¹³. He was the editor of several weeklies, kerala sanchari, Mitavadi, gaja kesari, saraswathi, and the monthly weeklies were *Atma poshini*, *Deepam* and *Samudaya deepika* . . He was the correspondent of the English Newspaper *Madras mail*¹⁴. He was the editor of weeklies and monthlies published from Malabar, cochi and Travancore and he has rendered yeoman service to Malayalam literature¹⁵

Murkkoth strongly fight against corruption¹⁶. Several literary men attempted to write the biography of Sree narayana guru but murkkoth who wrote the biography of guru attained first position and it was the most popular

⁹ Mooliyil Kesavan, Murkkoth Kumaran, Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery,1941,p-42

¹⁰ Ibid,p-42

¹¹ Smaranika Sree Narayana Samsakarikakendram, Kuttimakool,2015

¹² Ibid,p-42

¹³ Mooliyil Kesavan, Murkkoth Kumaran, Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery,1941,p-42

¹⁴ Champadan Vijayan, Vadakke Malabarile Gurudevashishyanmar, Sreenarayana C utural center, Thalassery,2007,p- 59

¹⁵ Mooliyil Kesavan, Murkkoth Kumaran, Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery,1941,p-43

¹⁶ Vivekodayam, book5,issue 6,1971,September,p-42

biography of Sree Narayana guru¹⁷. He won a prize and gold medal for his work on the life of Sree Narayana Guru. Murkkoth kumaran whole heartily supported the British administration and he wished to extend their administration. He clearly understood the benefits of British administration especially to the lower communities of Kerala. He praised the British administration through his papers and magazines¹⁸.

Murkkoth kumaran was a versatile genius he served several positions in the society. Eighteen years he was the councilor of Thlassery Municipality. Nine years he was a member of district educational council. He was the vice president of Kottayam Taluk. Three times he was the chairman of Kerala sahitya parishath. He was the chairman of SNDP YOGAM Special conferences. He was the Malayalam examiner of Madras University for several years. The Madras government convened round table conferences for janmi and kudiyan and this conferences Murkkoth kumaran was a representative of Kudiyan¹⁹. After the death of murkkoth kumaran a book was published in the name of Murkkoth smaraka grantham. Several scholars expressed their deep condolences. This book started with the content of “the death of murkkoth created a big loss of malayalam language and Thiyya community”²⁰. Mahakavi Ulloor condolences message was deeply heart touching he said that” his irreparable loss created a big tragedy of Malayalam language”²¹. The newspaper chandrika clearly stressed the contributions of murkkoth in various fields. He was a journalist, literary man above all he was a public worker. He was a noted leader from Thiyya community²². He had good religious ideas and belief in god at the same time he criticized irrational things. He was the true friend of chandrika paper and he contributed several articles for chandrika.

He believes in god but at the same time he discards the outward trappings of religion²³. He revealed his attitudes and ideals about social problems through his short stories, novels and essays. He strongly defended the

¹⁷ K.R Achuthan, Murkkoth kumaran- chila chintakal, vivekodayam, book 5, Issue 5, 1971 August, p-69

¹⁸ Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery, 1941, June 26, p-18

¹⁹ Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery, 1941, June 26, p-3

²⁰ Murkkoth smaraka grantham, Thalassery, 1941, June 26

²¹ Condolences message of Mahakavi Ulloor in Murkkoth smaraka grantham, July 2, Calicut.

²² Chandrika 1941 June 27

²³ Ibid, p.201

child marriage, *Talikettukalayanam*, bribery, corruption and other illegal system existed in the society²⁴. He clearly portrayed the custom *Thalikettukalayam* in his novel “*ottanokk*”²⁵. He strongly advocated the women rights and the upliftment of women community in Kerala and also he was the propagator of equal rights of men and women in the society. Women should give the rights to do for the welfare of the society. She was the controller of family and has the right to guide the husband and children, also should give the power and freedom to take decisions related to family issues²⁶. The success of every family related to the mutual understanding of men and women and root out the family issues by considering equal freedom for husband and wife or men and women. Several Thiyya leaders of North Malabar especially Kottiyath Ramunni, Kottiyath Krishnan, Cheruvari Govindan, Uppot Kanari Vadhyan, Mamavalli Govindan, Panagadan Govindan had taken several efforts to the upliftment of Thiyya community of North Malabar. Among these leaders Murkkoth had taken several efforts to the welfare of his community and the all lower communities of North Malabar. Under the leadership of Murkkoth Kumaran” Prayers Mud” was started for organizing all untouchable and lower communities in an organization²⁷. Murkkoth was a very broad minded personality he had long vision about family and society. He was a strong follower of Sree Narayana Guru on the part of welfare measures he applied the same principles of Sree Narayana Guru. Murkkoth Kumaran was a very good actor and always he performed women character and K.P. Keshavamenon said that Murkkoth performed the women character very well²⁸. Murkkoth was a very bright intelligent and efficient teacher and above all he was a service minded man. He was a teacher at St. Joseph European Boys High School at Calicut in the year 1897. The school authorities identified the caliber of Kumaran and his dedicated work and he promoted as a head master of the same school. At that time the European schools not permitted to appoint English teacher from Indians or Natives but the Murkkoth Kumaran was appointed as an English teacher in the European school²⁹. Everybody knows Kumaran was efficiently used Malayalam language but he had an extraordinary caliber and knowledge and the quality to use the English language and this was identified by the Europeans and they appointed as an English teacher

²⁴ Ibid ,p.201

²⁵ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahityaprabharthakasarahanasangh,Kottayam,1975,p.111

²⁶ Chandrika 1941 June 27

²⁷ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Op.cit, p-.111

²⁸ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahityaprabharthakasarahanasangh,Kottayam,1975,p.138

²⁹ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahityaprabharthakasarahanasangh,Kottayam,1975,p.67

without any hesitation. He had given prime importance to give education to girls students. At that time there was no special importance given to the women education after completing elementary education girls were not permitted to enter the higher studies. In this particular social scenario Murkkoth kumaran actively interfere or worked to give education for all especially he had given special care for women education. In the year 1902 to 1906 he worked in the Convent school, he convened a meeting of the Natives to share the importance of education and he tried his best for giving awareness and necessity for the women education. After his awareness talk parents were permitted to send their girls to higher education. Under his guidance three women especially from lower caste attained high degree and reached well settled position in the society³⁰. In the year 1913 to 1923 he worked as a head master of Basel mission school Nittur. He retired his service as a teacher from St. Joseph boys school Thalassery in the year 1930. He published 23 works. *Vellikai and vasumathi* are the novels of murkkoth Kumaran. *Markkadasandesham, Ellanchipoomala, Ashakula, Darshanamala* are the prose works of murkkoth kumaran. *Vaidhyante anubhagal, kunhachantekathakkal* are the *Balasachityakritikal* of Murkkot Kumaran. He was the member of Malabar educational council. He worked the editor of twelve newspapers. A.R Rajaraja varma appreciated the works and simple language style of Murkkoth Kumaran. Basically he was an active social reformer and he tried to uplift all communities in a same way. In the earlier period there was no permission to enter the pulayas in Jaganatha temple Thalassery. Murkkoth kumaran strongly fight against this arrogant attitude among his community and finally he got victory and everyone to permit to enter the temple without considering the caste or creed. The shashti celebration of Murkooth kumaran the famous poet Uloor mentioned that ‘His pen worked as a weapon for wisdom at the same time his pen worked as a gun for evil or irrationality’. Under the leadership Murkkoth kumaran and his service minded followers established a statue of Sree narayanaguru in the premises of Sree Narayana temple at thalassery. Murkkoth had an extra ordinary caliber and ability to do anything and even his teachers were known by their student murkkoth kumaran. During his school days he had good relationship with his teachers and his autobiography he mentioned his teachers particularly Tatha kanaran and kunhappu gurukkal pangagadan raman master another thing was that these teachers from the Thiyya community of north Malabar.

³⁰ Grace chandran first B.A Degree holder from Malabar from Christian community, P.V Janakiamma second lady doctor from Malabar from Mukkuva community, T.P Janakiamma was a wellknown teacher of North Malabar from Thiyya community. See Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahithyapraparthakasaahakaranasangh, Kottayam, 1975, p.67

His son Murkkot kunhappa was a literary luminary and he wrote several articles in different journals and weeklies. After retiring from railway service he worked as an associate editor of Manorma unit Calicut. Murkoth kumaran, his second son murkoth ramunni was the airforce officer and he was the only Malayali selected for airforce during the first world war. He was the wing commander of Nehru cabinet and he served several places like Nepal and Bangladesh and he retired with the position of I.A.S. After retirement he served several committee chairmen.

Murkoth kumaran younger son murkoth Srinivasan was a well known English teacher. Thirty one years he worked as a teacher in this period twenty four years he served as a principal.

Murkoth kumaran's father murkoth Ramunni was a well known businessman, elocutionist and also a reformer. He contributed some amount for poor people house construction and he paid the marriage expenses of poor girls and also he provided the educational facilities of poor and efficient students of their community³¹.

The Thiyya ladies of north Malabar had a habit of singing poorakalipattu, Thacholipattu during they involved in the agricultural activities³². The main theme of this song was the praising of the old Thiyya leaders and their activities. Murkoth kumaran had written Vadakkanpattu and this song he mainly portrayed the activities of the Thiyyas and their temples and the deeds of Sreenarayanaguru. Murkoth kumaran's father Ramunni was a very powerful and intelligent and a very popular man of north Malabar and his deeds were praised and published in the form of Poorakali pattu³³. The Thiyya community of North Malabar followed the Matrilineal family system³⁴. As per the system sisters children were the right to enjoy the property of the family. Murkoth kumaran father was a very rich man but he didn't get any share of his father's property because of this matrilineal right. The Thiyya leaders of North Malabar especially Murkoth family, Murkoth kumaran and his father murkoth ramunni had a key role to root out the outdated customs existed in North Malabar.

³¹ I R Krishnan Metala, Murkoth Kumaran jeevithasamaramakkiya Netav, Sahityaprabarthakasahakaranasangham, 2016, p.16

³² Murkoth Kumaran, Ambalapattu, Third edition, Tellicherry, 1941

³³ I R Krishnan Metala, Murkoth Kumaran jeevithasamaramakkiya Netav, Sahityaprabarthakasahakaranasangham, 2016, p. 21

³⁴ R Krishnan Metala, Murkoth Kumaran jeevithasamaramakkiya Netav, Sahityaprabarthakasahakaranasangham, 2016, p.22

He revealed his identity very boldly he never afraid to fight against anything related to unnecessary evils and customs³⁵. He not only concentrated literary work at the same time he was very much interested to do community welfare activities. He and his wife actively invoved the welfare activities. His wife yasodhamma was a very kind lady he provided food for poor people and provide shelter for small kids³⁶. His first community welfare activities started from Jaganatha temple, at that time in the jaganatha temple not permitted to worship the pulaya community. Murkkoth kumaran strongly against these worthless activities of the temple authority and finally his attempt became success and the pulayas achieved their right and all the people even any caste and community could enter and worship the temple.

The social reform activities of Murkkoth kumaran was not confined in to the Thiyya community alone. He worked the upliftment of all low caste communities especially poor people of kerala. He argued that every people of kerala never considered caste and creed should permit to the member of Janodayaya yogam³⁷. On the part of the yogam we were joined together and to do welfare activities for the common goodness of the society. Murkkoth Kumaran never accepted religious conversion and argued that conversion was not a better way to uplift the community or liberate them from the traditional caste bondage of kerala. He strongly against Thiyyas to accept christianity or Buddhism if anyone from our community to accept the other religion their fate became same their condition never became improve³⁸. Murkkoth kumaran strongly fight against the existed caste system of kerala at the same time he argued that some extent the lower communities liberated them from the caste atrocities by the influence of British Administration. He strongly supported the british administration and their implemented policy of education for all irrespective of caste and creed. But he stressed the point was that only limited minorities could earn education and reached the better position in the society. He mentioned the statistics was that out of eighteen lakh thiyyas seventeen lakh ninty nine people became illiterate and there was no freedom and became the servant of the upper communities³⁹. Only one percentage became better position and economically well prospered in this background Murkkoth kumaran argued that we joined together for the

³⁵ Sree Narayana guru Centenary Souvenir ,Shivagiri,1954

³⁶ R Krishnan Metala, Murkoth Kumaran jeevithasamaramakkiya Netav, Sahityaprarthakasaahakaranasangham,2016, p.p.58

³⁷ Vivekodayam,1974,October,Book 8,Issue 10

³⁸ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahithyaprarthakasaahakaranasangh,Kottayam,1975,p.107

³⁹ Murkkoth Kunhappa, Murkkoth Kumaran, Biography, Sahithyaprarthakasaahakaranasangh,Kottayam,1975,p.105

upliftment of our community or the all untouchable and poor people of kerala. The excess amount from the temples should provide the welfare activities of the common people. There was a customs existed in North Malabar that was every year Thiyyas will go to the temple Kottiyoor with Tender coconut. Murkot kumaran and Kottiyath Ramunni against this custom and argued that the devotees should go to the Jaganatha temple and offered their gifts to Jaganatha temple.

Conclusion

Murkkoth was a well known social reformer from north Malabar. He dedicated his whole life for engaging social reform and community development and literary activities. Every simple novel and short stories of Murkkoth was heart touching. He was a humorous writer at the same time he Portrayed the social issues in a humorous style. He sincerely worked for the upliftment of lower communities. His dream was to unite the whole community.

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