

THE PHILOSOPHY OF E.M. SANKARAN NAMBOODIRIPAD

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Abstract

EMS Namboodiripad, a Communist Party leader who believed in the socio-economic upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. Besides politics, he wrote a number of books concerning philosophy, art, literature, history and even films. The Important Philosophical Ideas of EMS are; Ardent Love for Marxism, Human Oriented Philosophy, Love for Downtrodden, Empowerment of Women, Attitude towards Religion, Belief in Democracy, etc constitute the basic thoughts detailed in this paper.

Keywords: *Philosophy, EMS Namboodiripad, Marxism, Human Oriented Philosophy Downtrodden, Democracy, etc*

Introduction

EMS Namboodiripad, was a staunch leader of the Communist Party and believed in the socio-economic upliftment of the weaker sections of the society. He was a mass leader and was always heard with much respect by the audience. He supported several welfare measures for the youths, mainly students, labour class, peasantry and destitute in our society. As a Chief Minister of Kerala, he carried out several development schemes in several areas like agriculture, industry, education, social welfare and employment. Besides politics, he wrote a number of books concerning philosophy, art, literature, history and even films. His literary career had started way back in 1931 when he wrote a biography of Jawaharlal Nehru. It comes as a surprise to many, that the scholar who penned over a hundred books and thousands of articles on various subjects did not even have a university degree. But the tradition of scholarship bequeathed down generations especially among Brahmins, was something that he willingly imbibed. Thus he became “the second Sankara of Kerala –after Adi Sankaracharya who propounded the Advaita philosophy –with the unquenchable thirst for knowledge”. He also incorporated the essence of Sri Narayana Guru’s social reform movement in his own political philosophy.

EMS’s life was an endless search for truth. EMS was at heart influenced by Gandhiji, through his intellect was dominated by Marx. His style had the qualities of Gandhian simplicity, clarity and lack of artificiality.

The Important Philosophical Ideas of EMS

i) Ardent Love for Marxism

EMS Namboodiripad, was an ardent follower of the Marxist ideology. According to Karl Marx, “Communists openly declared that their ends can be attained only by the overthrows of all existing structures. It

is because, the Capitalist class clings to the privileges and refuses to abandon it without revolution". However, EMS Namboodiripad [1909-1998] was, in all probability, the most important revolutionary figure that modern India has produced. It is this quality in EMS of grasping the theoretical essence of the Marxist approach and translating it into political movements and practical solutions-which made him, stand above most others. The Kerala Communist Movement was fortunate in having P. Krishna Pillai, the founder and the master organizer; A K Gopalan, the mass leader and EMS. In the annals of the movement, history will record the pre-eminent position of EMS in this brilliant trio who fused his immense theoretical abilities with unerring practical politics.

Karl Marx was an outstanding intellectual and he could have occupied a leading position in the academic world of the then European countries of the time. He however opted for a life of penury. The great theoretician wrote the significant work "Das Capital" but his family had to undergo a life of poverty. Had it not been for his commitment to the cause of the working class, he would have given the entire struggle. He was a builder of a more human society. As Marx himself observed in a significant context, "Philosophy finds in the working class into material weapon while the working class finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy".

Two things set EMS apart from all of them and made him unique. First EMS with his extraordinary intellectual genius was able constantly to stay ahead of his contemporaries in applying Marxism to the specific conditions in Kerala and later the whole of India. He was a path finder. In 1939, even when his study of Marxism was elementary, he wrote a brilliant note of dissent on the Malabar Tenancy Reforms in the committee set up by the Madras Legislature, of which he was a member. The trenchant analysis of the "Jenmi" (landlord) system and the advocacy of radical land reforms presaged his later pioneering role in initiating land reform measures as the first Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957.

EMS's deep understanding of Marxian theory and ideology, and his historical vision are considered most important good qualities. Ten years before he became the Chief Minister, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai wrote in "Prasanna Keralam" that, "EMS won't write anything without voracious reading, earnest study and deep thinking. He was indeed a great scholar. His writings have rare lucidity, clarity and real greatness. It is due to his scholarly knowledge, his deep thinking and meditation that he was drawn to the drift of revolutionary politics. Undaunted but innocent, he continued to work for the party. He never liked to put the old philosophy to the poor, nor did he speak to them from the platform to win their support, his lofty mind prevented such things. He fought ardently for the poor and the oppressed and he co-operated friendly. With people who had similar views and ideals. He held his sword of revolution against land lordism which had its roots in self-enjoyment and power. He again wrote about EMS that "the right of EMS with the unshelled sword of revolution with the righteous indignation and his all-pervading innocence and abiding honesty are really exhilarating inspiring.

EMS's opines that, "Karl Marx was a great theoretician. His contributions to the theory of philosophy, political economy, political science and socio-cultural development aesthetics and so on would put him among the most distinguished theoretician in world history. He occupied this position as a great theoretician because he was a "Revolutionary Political Activist". He again said that, "like Marx, Engels and Lenin, post Leninist Marxist to further develop Marxist theory through the revolutionary application of that theory to their own country

concrete situation. Thus was done for Italy by Gramsci, for China by Mao Zed Tung, HoChiMin for Vietnam and for every other country by the collective leadership of Marxist- Leninist of these countries.

The rise of peasants' struggles in Kerala against land lordism was the introduction to Marxism and he became a lifelong adherent to the cause of communism. This trajectory of political development is mirrored in hundreds of militant young men and women who joined the Left movement in the 1930's. EMS also stood for classless and casteless society. He used a thousand different arguments and churned out an equal number of pamphlets to prove that, the idea of a classless society was in no way irrelevant in the modern market driven world. But for the faithful, the most persuasive example was the man himself, the life he led.

As a Marxist follower, EMS had always tried to bring about socialistic principles in society. Like many of his young contemporaries, EMS Namboodiripad was drawn towards socialism by the experience of the Great Depression of the 1930's. The fact that even as the capitalist world was reeling under the impact of massive unemployment and unutilized resources, the Soviet Union, untouched by the crisis, was taking gigantic strides towards developing its productive forces, opened his mind to the stark contrast between the two systems. It won him to the socialist cause, it also left him with two of his abiding intellectual interests; planning and social laws.

The CPI (M)'s concept is Proletarian Socialism in which the working class, in firm alliance with the peasants and other sections of the working people, play the leading role in bringing about social transformations. EMS opines that, "Marxism-Leninism is a class movement which is capable of uniting believers and non-believers among the working people in a strong and powerful way". He also said "Marxism-Leninism help us to unite the common people belonging to all castes and in the process fight against the divisive trends show by the leaders of all castes.

Marx, Engels and Lenin used the term, "Dictatorship of the Proletariat", to distinguish proletarian democracy from bourgeois dictatorship under the cover of parliamentary democracy. So, undoubtedly it may be said that, he was a blind follower of Marxian- Leninist philosophy. He changed Marxism to Indian conditions without destroying its true spirit. EMS always spent his time and energy by supplementing and explaining Marxian thought and took keen interest in mingling the same with the changing situations.

ii) Human Oriented Philosophy

EMS began his public activities in 1930. When as a student also, he participated in the Namboodiri Social Reform Movement. He gave more importance to the cause of man. EMS who was born in to a feudal upper caste family did not have a house or property in his name. The same simplicity reflected in his ideology which instantly made sense to the working class. Born and brought up among Gods and devils, the Namboodiris were exhorted to become men. And at last all men were brought to dream of liberation. So, he always considered as the Adi Sankara.

In personal as well as in larger socio-political terms, the life story of EMS can be read as a story of recurrent challenge and creative, obstacle-clearing responses. His initiation into public life came with and adolescent struggle to overcome his high caste, feudal landlord origins through progressive humanism and

personal morality of a higher order. His first significant success came in the social realm; it was in the youth struggle within the community to “make the Namboodiri a human being”.

EMS quickly saw through the laid back, exploitative lifestyle of the Namboodiris and joined the “*Yogakshema Sabha*” which was trying to reform his community. He fought against practices like untouchability, polygamy and coined the slogan, “Namboodiri must become a human being”. The quest to “make the Namboodiri a human being” by breaking the shackles of hide-bound upper caste conservatism began the remarkable journey to the making of a proletarian revolutionary who strove to liberate the whole of community.

iii) Love for Downtrodden

EMS Namboodiripad, is considered as the “adopted son of working class”. He spent his life for the upliftment of the working class community. EMS and his followers campaigned to make ordinary workers and peasants politically conscious about social inequalities and communist ideals. In 1940, the British Government banned the Communist Party. Communist leaders in Malabar went underground. About hid years in hiding, EMS later recalled; “April 1940 was a turning point in my life. Seven months had passed since the Second World War began. All of us were engaged in anti-war activities. The party decided we should go into hiding. One night, I left home without telling even my wife. I left her and our one-year-old daughter. Nobody knew for how long a period. It created a lot of tension inside me and in another way it was a happy occasion. For the first time in my life I could establish a heart –to-heart relationship with ordinary people who were not members of my community-peasants farm and fish workers, the poor. Until then my relationship with them was only in my mind. It had not touched my heart”.

No ordinary Namboodiri would have dared to rub shoulders with the “untouchables”, the ordinary farm workers, peasants and their families, eat meat and fish with them and become a part of their lives for days on end. But EMS’s work was to be among the lower castes, untouchable labourers and ordinary workers. In his life time, EMS was a significant force in the social revolution and transformed Kerala from as obnoxious past when untouchability and unapproachability were practiced to the equitable society that it is today.

In his autobiography, EMS said that the changes that he underwent at a personal level were as important as the social changes that he was instrumental in bringing about. He noted “although I was born in a family that was at the top of the caste-ridden feudal society, I grew up as a communist and a party worker who was engaged in ridding society of the evils of casteism and feudalism. I evolved further so as to sell my huge estates and donate the entire proceeds for the party. This is what made me the adopted son of working class”.

He was active in the peasant movement in Malabar, he helped to formulate the demands of the peasantry and was really the architect of India’s first land reform (his note of Dissent to the Malabar Tenancy Bill in the late 1930’s was a landmark document of its time). EMS was also one of founders of the All India Kisan Sabha in 1936. Later he wrote his famous book, “A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala”. It is true that he led a very simple life, like an ordinary person during his span time.

iv) Empowerment of Women

EMS, also worked for the empowerment of women. During childhood, there prevailed a number of evil custom among women folk. So, he decided to fight against such evil custom and to liberate women. Even at a very young age, he himself had been active in the movement for social reform among Namboodiris, particularly in the movement against the oppression and seclusion of women of the caste. Yogakshema Sabha played a prominent role imparting education to women. Through “Unninamboodiri” EMS spread the ideas of social regeneration of women. He also worked with V T Bhattathiripad and M B Bhattathiripad for awakening the Namboodiripad women.

EMS become an Assistant Secretary of the Valluvanadu Yogakshema Sabha and campaigned vigorously for liberating Namboodiri women from oppressive customs. In 1931, EMS took the initiative for the first widow remarriage in the Namboodiri community for which he was “ostracised”. He organized picketing at venues where old men tried to marry young girls and collected funds to fight the “Karanavars”, the heads of traditional matrilineal families, who would not allow their wards enough means even for a decent education. When he became the Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957 passed Education Bill, which created a dramatic change in society.

EMS always says about women empowerment in connect with reservation of seats in govt. services. When the Malabar district in the composite state of Madras and the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin were merged to form Kerala, the Communist Govt., of the new state provided for reservation in government jobs for Muslim Mappilas as well as the others all over the state. Kerala thus became the first state where Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward communities as well as Muslims were given reservation in government jobs. Those who try to mix this question with the question of empowering women by providing them with reservation of seats in Parliament and in the state legislatures are spokesperson for male chauvinism. They went to sabotage the broadly welcomed proposal to get 30% of the seats in legislative bodies reserved for women. To insist on reservation for communities as a condition for empowering women is nothing but male chauvinism.

v) Attitude towards Religion

Equal respect for all religion is the basis of EMS philosophy. Therefore, he proceeded, the state should not subsidise or patronize and religious community. Even though, EMS was born in a caste-ridden Namboodiri family, he always stood against religious evil practices. He always said that, man is superior to any other. Right from the beginning, little Sankaran was different in many ways from other Namboodiri kids of his age. Perhaps it was an indication of things to come when the boy shed tears for the Pulaya (lower caste man) whose hut had to make way for a new road to his “Illam”.

EMS opines that, “the socialist and Communist tried to uphold the interest of the backward classes and religious minority. Communists, therefore worked among the poor and the middle class to establish strong bonds of unity and EMS achieved credible unity and integrity among the working class. According to him, the religious people should be allowed to go their own way through their voluntary organizations. He was therefore opposed to his own or other Christian churches as well as their counterparts in the non-Christian communities using their spiritual hold on the people in favour of or against any political party.

There was no place for religion in the philosophy of Marx, which attributed everything to the economic factor. The Marxist-Leninist for their part have made it clear that while they are opposed to the political use of any religion (in elections and so on). They respect the religious sentiments of the people and would do anything to wound their feeling. While they respect the right of the religious people to be believe in and practice as their respective religion. “Unto God what is his and unto the state what is its”. Such is the word and spirit of secularism as the Marxist-Leninist conceive. Marxist-Leninist, however, go further and see what is positive in genuine religion, as opposed to the “religion” believed in and practiced by the exploiting classes.

EMS is of his opinion that “Marx in of his celebrated writings said that criticism of religion is the beginning of criticism of society in general”. Engels was highly appreciative of the principles of early Christianity, which he claimed, can be found in the documents of modern labour movement. EMS opines that, “Communists did not show any discriminative attitude towards religion. The Marxist Party involves all religious communities. This is clearly understood, through the first elected communist ministry in Kerala, which came into power in 1957 under the Chief Ministership of EMS, which include all the religious people. CPI (M) State Secretary, Pinarayi Vijayan said that “Communist fight for the abolition of religious fundamentalism and not for attack any religion”.

It is significant that Mahatma Gandhi, who was the supreme leader of our freedom movement for a full quarter century, characterized the poor people in India as “Daridranarayanan”. Devoutly religious as he was considered the workers and peasants of our country the living Gods in whose survives he laboured for a whole lifetime. The position that religion should not interfere in political matters does not mean that individual people believing in any religion, including their spiritual leaders, should not participate in political activities. What is mean is that the ‘authority’ of the religious leaders should not be used for one or against another individual political party or group. Though an atheist, EMS never prevented his wife Arya Antharjanam from worshipping her Gods. In fact, he willingly accompanied her to temples. The fact is that, EMS placed man in the place of God. He is of opinion that the most important duty of religious must be humanitarian.

vi) Belief in Democracy

EMS was not only a revolutionist, but also a champion of democracy. EMS was the most innovative in expounding the role of parliamentary democracy in India and relating Marxist strategy and tactics to developing the working-class movement in such conditions. EMS Namboodiripad was the first Chief Minister of democratically elected Communist ministry in the world. From 1957 onwards, EMS was the pace-setter in clarifying and developing the role of a Communist Party which participates in governments where it has popular mandates, while continuing to keep the major focus on developing mass movements and the struggles of the working class. Even towards his last days, EMS was deeply concerned with the corrosive effects of parliamentarian, which subordinates the interests of the mass movements and the demands of class struggle.

EMS Namboodiripad, also possess a quality which made him a phenomenon rarely seen in India, is his role in shaping society and politics by unleashing the democratic impulses of the people. His life was a democratic dialogue and polemical debates. His daily engagement was with the people of Kerala and its politicians through the print media and his public meetings. This, along with his personal example of intellectual commitment,

integrity and simplicity made him the most belonged thinker Kerala has produced. A K Antony, the congress leader, express the feelings of all Malayalam when he said; “Kerala will not be the same again without EMS”.

EMS, also participated to bring democratic decentralization in Kerala. Following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which provide for the setting up and functioning of the three-tier panchayat and Nagarapalikas, various state Govt. have amended their panchayat, Municipal and corporation Acts. They have initiated measures to transfer power to the Panchayati Raj and Urban bodies. EMS said that, “While it is welcome that these Acts provide for decentralization in the state, they continue to keep with the centre all the powers that is enjoys under the constitution. A radical re-casting of the Central, State and Concurrent lists in the constitution is long overdue what is required is a clearly-defined division of functions and responsibilities among the centre, the states, the districts and the other local bodies, to each of which a definite part of all development department must be allotted”.

This will obviate the need for Education, Health, Agriculture, and Industries other than basic and large scale, co-operatives and other similar Departments to be at the centre. Officers and employees working in these ministries can be transferred to the States, which in their turn can transfer them to the three-tier panchayats and urban bodies. This will on the other hand, reduce the administrative expenditure of the Central and the State Government. While on the other it will give experienced officers to the Panchayati Raj and Nagarapalika institutions. It will make democratic decentralization a reality. EMS’s vision on decentralization appeared first in the forum of the dissent note to the Ashok Mehta Committee report on Local Self Government institutions in India. He firmly believed that there cannot be a full-fledged decentralization without restructuring of centre-state relations.

Conclusion

Thus EMS participated in every fields of human activity. He was a tireless man. More than any other person on the Indian Left, he succeeded in bridging the gap between theory and practice, conceptualization and action, movement and organization, high soaring individual genius and disciplined collective functioning. EMS greatest achievement as a revolutionary was the integration of all these sides. This was achieved in life long practice of transparently simple living and high thinking, integrity that remains beyond question, morality and humanism of the highest order that is profound class based and partisan in a progressive sense.

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