



Social Revolution of Sri Vidyadhiraja Chattambi Swamikal

Dr.Renjith P.G^{1*}

^{1*}Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, SNM College, Maliankara, Email: renjithpgskt@gmail.com, 9447916165

***Corresponding Author:** Dr.Renjith P.G

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, SNM College, Maliankara, Email: renjithpgskt@gmail.com, 9447916165

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to show the place of Sri Chattambi Swamikal in the context of Kerala modernity. The making of the contemporary Kerala society was profoundly influenced by its ideological orientations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period several socially sensitive reformers tried to imbibe ideas of modernity and enlightenment in society. Chattambi Swamikal was one of the well-known social reformers in India. He was a philosopher, a poet, a mystic, and a social revolutionary. He desired to spread the message of the mystic experience and the presence of divine to one and all in society. In Kerala, the activities of Chattambi Swamikal and Narayana Guru encompassed the dimensions. His thoughts and actives have catalyzed many social movements and reforms in Travancore. Swamikal along with his contemporary, Narayana Guru and Ayyankali during 19th century strived hard to fight against caste system and social injustice that existed in Kerala a century ago. He also worked for emancipation of women and encouraged them to overcome creation of social disabilities of the Travancore society. He propagated the principles of 'Ahimsa' and preached for the classless society. Chattambi Swamikal articulated Advaita Vedanta and drew upon it in his social engagement. In the realm of the Kerala social reforms, his thoughts generated change which positively shaped masses towards freedom and provide further interpretative insights in to the ideological make up of Kerala society.

KEYWORDS: Jivatmas, Panchabutas, Sukshma, Sthula, Sarirotpatti, Dasagunas, Prapancholpatti, Tatvamasi, Sruti, Smriti, Asana, Ahimsa, Trigunas, Trimurthees.

There are many studies have observed that the development experience in the State of Kerala has been different from that in other States of India. It has also been pointed out that socio-religious reform movements have had a major role to play in contributing to this distinct development experience. There were a large number of social and religious reformers in Kerala in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which attracted people from different regions and walks of life towards an agenda of reforms through exhortation, advice. Chattambi Swamikal (1853–1924) was one of the people who managed to transform Kerala state of India and its society. He was a special social reformer, an unusual one. Without establishing any organisations he conveyed the required message among the people in Kerala. Chattampi Swamikal initiated religious and social reformation in Kerala. Based on Vedanta, a theory in Indian philosophy, his method of approach to the reformation was simple and unique.

A few decades ago Kerala was an extreme example of social and economic inequalities- 'a lunatic asylum' in the words of Swami Vivekananda. Over a third of its population was outcastes and treated as untouchables. They have to keep off meters and meters away from high caste Hindus. Educational institutions were not opened to them. Government jobs were denied and temple entry forbidden to them. Today the picture is quite different in Kerala. But caste still lingers in mind. Education and every sector are opened to all. This transformation was brought about mainly the steps initiated by the great seers Sree Narayana Guru and Chattambi Swamikal.

Early life:

His father was Vasudevan Namboothiri, a Nambudiri Brahmin from Mavelikkara, and his mother was Nangamma, a Nair from Kannammoola. He was formally named Ayyappan but he was called by the pet name 'Kunjan' meaning "small male baby" by all. As his parents were not able to provide him formal education, he learned letters and words from children of his neighbourhood who attended schools. He also learned Sanskrit by overhearing the classes at a Brahmin house nearby. Knowing his thirst for learning an uncle took him to the traditional school conducted by Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan, a renowned scholar and writer who taught him without any fee. It was there that he earned the name Chattampi on account of his assignment as the monitor of the class. His thoughts were influenced the social, political, educational, religious aspects of the Kerala society.

Social Vision

According to Chattambi Swamikal, society and the world was a universal family of man without the barriers of caste or creed. He stood unmoved and tranquil like the Himalayas amidst the communal storms that raged. Overflowing with love for all created things he was a guileless as a child and his nature was sweet and gentle. He was a person who shunned publicity and limelight and his ability to pierce the depths of the human mind and discover its closest secrets was unparalleled, enriching the lives of those around him with the treasures of his cultured mind and personality.

Sri Chattambi Swamikal had a clear and precise understanding of the nature of unregenerate man as of the nature of God and the ultimate spiritual goal of man. The degenerate character of man is filled with greed, lust and sensual passion which along with other evil tendencies make a man a slave of maya. Knowing all this Chattambi Swamikal nevertheless accepted the ultimate goal of man note what he was but what should be. That was a rare combination of realism and idealism. Chattambi Swamikal succeeded in what he did because he had a clear social purpose in view that he wanted his faith and the discipline he had evolved to sink into the popular mind by his having, before his demise, pursue that Sree Narayana Guru to established temples.

Chattambi Swamikal gave a well-integrated and coherent system of ideas, symbols and a set of disciplines to his followers. His social purpose was thus clear, and he worked out that purpose efficiently and well. Through his teachings and utterances as recorded in his works he created a faith in the way of life prescribed by him. In the process he also drew around him a considerable body of people to whom he addressed his words. He not only gathered together all the floating traditions of his time but also grew into himself order, greater and more persistent traditions. He organised all Hindus and gave them a systematised and synthesised form of faith put into a meaningful mould. This was, by itself an act of great and far reaching social consequences. He was very considerate to all his associates. He took care to see that those who accompanied him on his visits were as well treated by his hosts as he himself was.

Universal Love

His ideal of a new social order in which all mankind is united by the bond of love has, since his time, gained much ground. He shook the people of Kerala out of their moral and mental lethargy and gave them the message of ahimsa and universal love. He was loving and compassionate towards all. He was content with what he had without settling down in one place, he went about blessing, everyone and everything. With his abundant love for all, he created a new era in spiritual regeneration. The horizon of his love extended to the utmost bounds of creation. Love which is viewed as an ennobling force by all religious and dharmas in the world is in fact the core of Chattambi Swamikal's message. His fellow feeling embraced all living creatures. If he unconsciously hurt even a worm striker feeling kept him sleepless for nights.

Contributions

Sri Chattambi Swamikal played a phenomenal role in the history of the cultural renaissance and social reform of Kerala led by the non-Brahmins to the light of spiritual awareness weaving this life and this phenomenal world as a not distinct from Brahman. He not only preached that all people are equal, but rather practiced this in every sphere of action. The teachings of Chattambi Swamikal's Vedic concepts and the dharmas of life can easily be followed by any householder. He was a Guru who showed the right path to the people of Kerala who had mistaken evil practices and usages for good ones. He believed that spiritual knowledge is an essential to man as food is. So he exhorted the under privileged who had long been enslaved by the priestly class to fight against any force that is detrimental to this doctrine of freedom to study the Vedas and rise in the ladder of spirituality. His engaging discourses on morality, compassion and devotion to God were certainly a source of inspiration and guidance to many of the families in Kerala. Chattambi Swamikal fought against casteism of all kinds, eradicated all the evil practices from the Hindu dharma. A monothesis by faith, he says that the Absolute is without names and forms. But giving it a name or a form through an idol did not seem wrong to Swamikal. Even idols were but manifestation of the Absolute. Chattambi Swamikal was not merely a preacher. His ministrations extended to visiting various families of aspirants. He dedicated himself to the task of making individuals ideal citizens and uplifting them through spirituality. The goal of human life is to become a knower of Brahman by embracing this vow of renunciation. The Supreme end is to enter the life of sanyasa.

Works of Chattampi Swamikal

All these improvements initiated by other people were the result of Chattampi Swamikal teachings and views. During his life Swamy wrote some works which were later published by his disciples and devotees. Chattampi Swamikal quoted authentic sources and proved that the legend that Kerala state of India was a gift of Parasurama was false. He established that the original inhabitants of Kerala were Nayakans and they brought prosperity to Kerala and it was Brahmins who came later and enforced the unjust caste system.

Major works

The compositions of Swami have come out in various forms of single stanzas, muktakas, bhajan songs, essays, critical works, translations, commentaries, short notes, and letters. Of them a few major works available in print are discussed in the following. Advaita Chinthapaddhathi, Nijanandavilasam, Vedadhikaranirupanam, Christhumatanirupanam, Sreechakrapujakalpam, Jivakarunyanirupanam, Mokshapadipakhandanam, Advaitapanjaram, Brahmatattvanirbhasam, Tarkarahasyaratnam, Paramasivastavam, Stavaratnavali, Pracheenamalayalam, Adibhasha, Chidakasalayam,

Punarjanmanirupanam, Vedantasaram, Manonasam, Desanamangal, Tamizhakam, Ozhuvilodukkam, sarvamatasarasyam. For the first time in the region's history the work questioned the monopolisation of Vedas, sciences and education by a minority. While Nithya Chaitanya Yati read it to his Master Nataraja Guru, the Master told that the words of the book are true like fire and it was to be considered our luck that these papers have not got burned.

Works on Vedanta

Swami wrote many guides and commentaries on Vedanta for the common man. Notable among them are Advaita Chinthapaddhathi and Advaitapanjaram, an introductory manual on practical Advaita written in simple language to enable ordinary people without knowledge of Sanskrit to learn Vedanta. The book describes the trigunas, trimurthees, jivatmas, panchabutas, sukshma, sthula, sarirotpatti, dasagunas, prapancholpatti, Tatvamasi and related Vedic concepts.

Works on Christianity

The book Christumatha Nirupanam contains two books - the Christumatha Saram (meaning Cream of Bible) and Christumatha Chethanam (Critical evaluation of Christianity). The first part is a sum up of what is Christianity. Swami describes the life of Christ in a long sentence, which is like placing an elephant in a mustard seed. In second book quoting the Christian scriptures Swami Points out how far the missionaries misinterpret and divert the concepts in the Bible and are working against the teachings of Christ.

Research methods

Pracheena Malayalam also aimed at awakening the mind of the people of the region divided by various complexes to a collective sense of 'We'. Convictions of common origin and belief in a common ancestry' were indispensable for the development of a collective mindset. Swami explored the roots of Kerala society and original inhabitants, and sociologically and genealogically connected most of the present groups in Kerala including the priestly class to common ancestors who were the original inhabitants known as the Nakas. Prof. Hrdyakumari opines that Pracheena Malayalam is not only a good example of Swami's logical arguments but is the earliest examples of application of hypothesis and fixed methodology for historical studies.

Women rights:

Swamikal also worked for the emancipation of women and encouraged them to come to the forefront of society. He stated that ancient religion and law in India gave equal status to women and that their role is very important in family and society. He stated that it was the misinterpretation of ancient texts resulting from male arrogance that degraded the position of women and their enslavement.

His Message

Chattampi Swamikal belonged to that rare band of religious leaders and world benefactors who led a selfless life in the midst of common people with their mundane concerns. They set an example for others to follow. They raise the moral and spiritual standards of the society they live in.

Swamikal visualized a universal family of man without the barriers of caste or creed. With his abundant love and compassion for all created things, he started a new epoch in spiritual regeneration. Humble creatures like ants and dogs were his brothers or friends.

Swamikal considered Ahimsa as the highest duty. He detested the killing of animals and the eating of meat. He believed that the path of Ahimsa led to Salvation. He declared that Brahmins and non-Brahmins have equal right to learn the Veda. He himself studied the Vedas and other sastras, hitherto denied to non-Brahmins. He explained Vedanta in a lucid style that could be understood even by an illiterate. He pointed out that women have equal, if not even more, rights in society. Few people have laboured harder than Swamikal to enable the people to break the chains of hereditarily acquired or traditionally held customs and practices to regain, maintain and strengthen their self-respect. His ideal of a new social structure involved all mankind united by the bond of love.

Conclusion:

The ideal of Sri Chattampi Swamikal was the building up of a new society characterized by a cultural life free from the ideas of the high and the low, then plaguing the life of India in general and Kerala in particular. And he did succeed in creating such a society by repudiating through appropriate reasoning the texts- the sruti's and smriti's which had created castes and sub castes and notions of high and low, the free man and the slave, and in bringing into being a new generation whose thinking was founded on the true values of humanism. The means he employed therefore were the doctrines of ahimsa and the vision of the Advaita Vedanta. He made the sense of equality founded on the Advaita vision the means of stimulating ahimsa. One can see that in the tenor of the teachings of Chattampi Swamikal the dominant note is the substance of ahimsa, here overtly and there covertly sounded.

Chattampi Swamikal was an extraordinary man living a simple life and setting an example for others in accordance with his views on casteless society, fair social and educational systems. Not only did Chattampi Swamikal transformed Hinduism but thanks to his life and work Vedas and Sanskrit became available to study and teach to all castes from which enormous number of people benefited. As a result of his work education and temples were no longer the property of Brahmins and all those exploiting other low castes in Kerala. Remarkable changes took place in Kerala

due to Chattampi Swamikal teachings and the work of his followers too. Kerala was no more the land of cruel injustice and inequality.

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