



**SREE CHATTAMPI SWAMIKAL: SOCIAL REFORMER IN
TRAVANCORE**

- **Ruby J.,**

ABSTRACT

Sree Vidyadhiraja Parama Bhattaraka Chattampi Swamikal, shortly known as Chattampi Swamikal was a Hindu sage and social reformer. He is also called as Sree Vidhyadhiraja Chattampi Swamikal. 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. He strongly opposed the conversion actives of the Christian missionaries though he was not against Christianity. According to him, different religions are different paths leading to the same place. Today the southern part of India, lower caste people occupied important places social, cultural, Education and other field. In this context, this paper highlighted the role of Chattampi Swamikal for the liberation of Travancore downtrodden.

KEYWORDS

social reformer, untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability, self-realisation, women rights.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Sree Vidyadhiraja Parama Bhattaaka Chattampi Swamikal was a Hindu sage and the social reformer, born on 30th August 1853 at kollur in southern Travancore. He denounced the orthodox interpretation of Hindu texts citing sources from the Vedas. In Kerala Swamikal along with his contemporary, Narayana Guru, strived to reform the heavily ritualistic and caste-ridden Hindu society of the last decade of 18th century and the beginning of 19th century. The so-called down trodden communities were not permitted to enjoy the basic rights of a human being. Untouchability, Unapproachability and Unseeability existed in the Travancore society by which the so-called Avarnas were prohibited to see and to touch a caste-Hindu. Swamikal also worked for the emancipation of women and encouraged them to the down forefront of society. Swamikal promoted vegetarianism and professed non-violence (Ahimsa) and he strongly believed that the different religions and different paths leading to the same place. He strongly opposed the conversion activities of the Christian missionaries but he was not against Christianity. Chattampi Swamikal throughout his intellectually and spiritually enriched life maintained a large number of friends from different regions of Kerala. He authored several books on spirituality, history, and language staying with these friends.

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.

Jnanaprajagaram

In 1870 Raman Pillai started a scholarly group named 'Jnanaprajagaram' with experts on different subjects with progressive attitude. It served as a meeting place for many scholars of that time and facilitated Kunjan to acquaint himself with many great men. He also learned

Tamil from Swaminatha Desikar and philosophy from Professor Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai during his participation in 'Jnanaprajagaram'. Kunjan Pillai was introduced into the science of yoga by Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal a scholar and yogi who used to give lectures at 'Jnanaprajagaram'. While so a wandering sadhu, who came to his village temple initiated him into spiritual world by giving the Balasubramanya Mantra. Mastering this mantra gave him a new vigor and zeal and he assumed the name Shanmukhadasa due to his deep devotion of Subramanya. He spent many years learning under Subba Jatapadikal. There he acquired deep and extensive mastery of all sastras in Tamil and Sanskrit. He also learned Siddha medicine, music, and martial arts. During this period he was greatly influenced by the works of Kodakanallur Sundara Swamikal, a great Advaitin Philosopher. He later translated his work *Nijananda Vilasam* containing the cream of Vedanta into simple Malayalam to guide spiritual aspirants.

Self-realisation

At the end of his wanderings and quest Kunjan Pillai was led to self- realisation by an avaduta whom he met at a wayside in Vadaveeswaram a village in Tamil Nadu with whom he lived for many months in the forests without any contact with the outside world. It is believed that this avaduta belonged to the line of immortal masters of Southern India; the Siddhas who knew the scientific art for realising God. He returned to Kerala as a great scholar and saint.

Study of other religions

After completing his studies under Subba Jatapadikal he spent long periods to learn Christian meditation and learned Christian religion and philosophy. Later he lived with an old Muslim well versed in Qur'an and Sufi mysticism who taught him the main tenets of Islam. Kunjan acquired proficiency reading Quran in the traditional way. Leaving him he wandered for months with many avadutas in Southern Tamil Nadu and also travelled all over India. These days revealed to him that the basic concepts of all religions are the same.

Major disciples

Swamikal's prominent disciples were Narayana Guru, Neelakanta Theerthapada and Theerthapada Parmahamsa. In 1882, at the Aniyoor Temple near Vamanapuram, Swamikal met Nanu Asan, later known as Narayana Guru was three years younger than Swamikal and in search of spiritual guidance. By then Swamikal was well-versed in yoga and spiritual matters and their meeting proved to be the start of a profound and cherished companionship, although the two were of different temperaments. In those days Nanu Asan was a soft-spoken introvert and Swamikal was an outspoken extrovert. They lived and travelled for many months together. Swami introduced Asan to all arts and sciences he had mastered and also

gave him the Balasubrahmanya mantra. These were the formative years of Asan, who later became a social reformer. Later Swamikal took Asan to his guru, Ayyavu Swamikal. After completing Asan's studies under Ayyavu Swamikal the men left him and wandered together in southern Tamil Nadu where they met many scholars. Narayana Guru practised austere Jnana and Yoga under Swamikal during this period." It was with Chattampi Swamikal that Asan made his first trip to Aruvippuram, which was chosen as his abode for meditation and spiritual activities and which was where he was led to self-realisation. It was after this that he was known as Narayana Guru. Swamikal did not stay there for long, although the two maintained a lifelong contact, respect and regard for each other. The poem Narayana Guru composed when he came to know of Swami's samadhi was the only offering he gave to any person and it reveals how he considered Swamikal to be a realised soul. It is the most authoritative critical assessment on Swamikal ever done.

In 1893 Swamikal met his second disciple, Theerthapada, a Sanskrit scholar and an expert in treating snakebites. In 1898, Theerthapada Paramahansa became Swami's disciple. He too worked for the removal of caste-related injustices in Kerala society. He established many ashrams and also Theerthapada System for the line of sanyasins following Swami's teachings and methods.

Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Abedananda, and many other saints ascribes to Swami the responsibility for their turning to spiritual life. Swami has also many grihastha disciples like Bodheswaran, Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidhyan, Velutheri Kesavan Vaidhyan Kumbalath Sanku Pillai etc. as well as sanyasi disciples like Neelakanta Therthapada and Theerthapada Parmahansa who played very important role in renaissance and reformation in Kerala.

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 sections.

VedadikaraNirupanam

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 region's history the work questioned the monopolisation of Vedas, sciences and education by a minority. While Nithya Chaitanya Yathi 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 is *Advaita Chinthapaddhathi* (1949), 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. Hridayakumari 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.

Conclusion : Swamikal settled down at Panmana, a village in Kollam district, towards the end of his life. He attained samadhi at Panmana School on 5TH May 1924 after a short illness during which he objected to taking any medicine. He was buried at his Samadhistanam at Panmana. He contributed lot for the upliftment of the Travancore low caste people. It paved the way another socio religious reform movements in Travancore.

REFERENCES

- Vijayalakshmi K.V, *Contribution of Chattanipi Swamikal to Advaita Philosophy*, Kannur, 2011, p.59.
- Sukumaran Nair G, *Chattampi Swamikal*, Ernakulam, 2000, p.25.
- Poulose C, *Advaita Philosophy of Chattanipi Swamikal*, Kanyakumari, 2002, p.25
- Nataraja Guru R. I., *Word of the Guru*, Cochin, Paico., 1980, p.259
- Maheswaran Nair, K, *Sree Narayana Guru, Sahithya Prvarthaka Sahakarana Sangham*, Kottayam, 2016, pp. 104-105.
- Bhaskaran.T, *Sree Narayana Guruvinte Sam poor n a Krithikal (Malayalam)* Calicut, 1985, pp.530-531.
- Santhkumari Amma, *Kumbalath Vidyadhiraja Chattampi Swamikal*, Trivandrum, 2003, p.20.
- Vidyananda Theerthapada and Ramakrishnan Nair C, *Sree Theerthapada Paramahansa Swamikal*, Kottayam, 1962, p.221-223.
- Kirtyanand Jha, *Chattampi Swami*, Kottayam, 1899, p.16-23.
- Maheswaran Nair, *Chattampi Swami: Jevithavum Krithikalum (Malayalam)*, Trivandrum, 1995, p.216.
- Raman Nair. R, *Chattampi Swami, Christumatha Chetanam*, Kottayam, 1884, p.24.
- Pracheena V, *Chattampi Swami, (Malayalam)*, Kottayam, 1962, p.78-79.
- Gopala Pillai K, *Parama Bhattara Chattampi Swami (Malayalam)*, Thrissur, 1935, p.91.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER



Ruby J.,

Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of History & Research Centre,
S.T.Hindu College, Nagercoil – 629 002