PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the socio-religious movements of Untouchables in Kerala before Independence with special reference to Gandhi. The study has also been done with Kumara Guru’s movement in Pathanamthitta District of Kerala.

In the Kerala scenario, social degeneration continued for a long time/period without any external or internal pressure for change. The result was that slavery and _aiyitham_ became the watchword of the society for a thousand years. During the British period a portion of Kerala i.e. Malabar became a part of British India. The British rules and regulations eased the social situation in Malabar. It did not mean that all social evils of Malabar were negated through the force of law. But compared to the rest of Kerala the situation in Malabar was a moderate one.

The rest of Kerala, Travancore and Cochin states were in the princely control under the British hegemony. In these princely states, changes took place very slowly in the nineteenth century of Christian Era. Social inequalities was the style of life in this part of India. The basic groups, workers, in these states were not recognised or given due respect. They were exploited by the _Savarna_ lobby and were pressurised with social and religious sanctions.
The emergence of Nambōōthiri social formation reduced the agrestic communities to the level of landless slaves in their own land. This was a long history of subjectification and subjugation of a culture by another alien culture (Brahminical) and this process of transformation progressed through ages and it happened so because of historical reasons. The universal principle, "unequal combinations are always dangerous to the weaker side", is applicable in the case of Harijans of Kerala. Their compromise with alien faiths made their life more subserviant and the above universal principle proved more true in their case.

Under the impact of colonial ideology and ways of life, in the nineteenth century, slavery in Travancore and Cochin states were banned through royal proclamations. The landless agrestic slave communities even after this legislations remained under the same slave condition, was the main concern of the researcher. The researcher argues that slave situation continued because of the historical reasons. Through years of social regulations and social taboos, the slave communities were forced or subjected to social and religious humiliation by a dominant minority. These unlucky human being’s (Harijan’s) mind was not completely delivered from the age old slave notion and situation which was deeprooted through generations. The change of the agrarian relations under the Nambōōthiri pressure was another reason of impoverishment and ostracism of Harijan sections in Kerala.
The socio-economic structure of Kerala in general and particularly of Travancore was governed with a chain of intermediaries. In this society, working in the agricultural field was the sole responsibility of the slave communities (Harijans) but the fruit of their hardships were fully enjoyed by the savarnās. At the top of the hierarchy were the Nambūṭhirī Brahmins, who were non-cultivating land owners. The Nair castes were non-cultivating lessees of Nambūṭhirī land in twelve years Kāṇam (leases). The agricultural labourers, both tied and free, came from the lower castes like Cheruman Pulayan, Parayan and from Pāṇan tribes. So it is clear that the agricultural labour forces of Kerala came from the Harijans.

Swadēshi is a spiritual discipline and if properly carried out by us will enable us to reach the goal of Sarvādaya, which aims at the welfare of all, not merely materially but towards the ultimate end of spiritual realization. Gandhi also recommends the removal of untouchability which follows from the principle of spiritual unity of all life. Gandhi says, untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism, but a plague, which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat. None can be born untouchable. To consider so is to support rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed. Thus Gandhiji welcomes inter-caste marriage particularly between savarna and untouchables and open temples for them.
Gandhiji’s crusade against untouchability and his leadership of Indian Independence Movement were based on ideals of social and political justice. His fight against untouchability was an advance in the direction of recognition of human rights.

Like Gandhiji, Kumara Guru, a famous Sarvodaya leader in Kerala championed the removal of untouchability, exploitation and inequality among the downtrodden in Kerala. He also sacrificed his whole life for the upliftment of Harijan compartments.

The researcher had selected Pathanamthitta district of Kerala for his research purpose which included an interview with the chief priest of the hundred year old Harijan Siva temple at Mailadumpara. The researcher had fruitful discussions with PRDS office bearers and also some savargha Hindu and Christian persons at various capacities.

The data has been collected by both formal and non-formal technique of interviews, observations and recall while examining the life and thought of both Gandhiji and Kumara Guru in various spheres. The researcher has personally contacted the PRDS leadership to acquire first hand information about Kumara Guru’s modus operandi. In addition to it, the researcher has interviewed senior individuals with rich living experience of Central Travancore.
Kumara Guru as a preacher and social reformer, operated his divine mission of emancipation of the culturally poor, and economically and socially backward sections with little literacy and with an empty purse. His endeavour was a grand success. He taught the poor Harijans, the high ideals of life and indepth religious concepts through a simple style of folk songs with common and familiar syntax. Mere affirmation of what Gandhiji and Kumara Guru said is not enough. With both scientific knowledge and faith as our guide, we must carry forward the torch of progress that was lit by both Gandhiji and Kumara Guru.

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