



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Significance Of C. Kesavan's Kozhencherry Speech In The History Of Kerala

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing C. Kesavan's Kozhencherry speech delivered on May 13, 1935. It explores the role of C Kesavan's Kozhencherry speech in paving the way for many progressive decisions, including the formation of the Travancore Public Service Commission and the achievement of job reservation for backward communities. The study reveals the significance of Kozhencherry speech in the context of today's anti-untouchability freedom and communal harmony in the state

Keywords; Nivarthana, Ezhava, Chatti Udayakkal, Janthu, lunatic asylum, bureaucracy, Diwan

Introduction

Socio-economic equality is pre-conditioned by political equality. This principles applies Kerala also. The Hindu caste hierarchy, with its several social and economic gradations, could be divided in to two broad categories- the privileged and the unprivileged. The caste Hindus of Kerala, as elsewhere in India constituted the privileged group. One of the important events that had taken place in South India in the 1930s was the struggle for responsible government. This struggle was fought for getting political democracy established. International Congress had adopted a policy of non-interference in the problems of the princely state. In Travancore this agitation was known as Nivarthana agitation or Abstention movement. The lower castes were denied all these powers and privileges. The Ezhava and the other lower caste Hindus were the majority in the population, but they did not get any fair representation in the public services of Travancore. The Christians and Muslims too had no representation. The Ezhavas were considered as depressed community.

The speech delivered by C. Kesavan on May 11, 1935 in Kozhencherry, criticizing the administration and actions of the Travancore government, was a turning point in the socio - political situation in Travancore. Kozhencherry speech is crucial in Travancore politics. The Kozhencherry speech was also not worthy for the courageous manner in which Kesavan publically challenged C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's repressive rule in Travancore even as it declared the rights of the subaltern classes and called for a relentless battle to achieve those rights.

C.Kesavan

C. Kesavan (23 May 1891) was the Chief Minister of Travancore- Cochin during 1950- 1952. He was born in an Ezhava family in 1891 in the village of Mayyanad near to Kollam in the Princely state of Travancore. C. Kesavan was influenced by the work of Padmanabhan Palpu and also by the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru, Gandhiji and Karl Marx. He worked for temperance and eradication of untouchability and served as General Secretary of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam. He became an activist for the Ezhava caste, seeking an improved socio- economic position for them, and in the 1930's he suggested that they should abandoned Hinduism. C. Kesavan wrote an incomplete autobiography, Jeevithasamaram consisting of two volumes that described his life up to the time of his political prominence. The work combined the story of his own life with a wider narrative concerning the plight of the Ezhava caste of which he was a member. In 1938, he formed the Travancore State Congress and became active in the freedom struggle. C. Kesavan, who led the relentless struggle for equal justice and equal rights for all sections of the society, became the Chief Minister of Thiru-Kochi in 1951 through his systematic organizational work and firm political stand. He took part in the Quit India Movement and spent one year in jail. He led the 'Chatti Udayakkal' movement against the brutal torture of freedom fighters inside the jail. He clung to the Gandhian ideal and could not sit quietly in the Chief Minister's post. He withdrew from politics, realizing that power was not sweet for a ruler who did not yield to pressure and influence. At that time, he was described as a 'two-legged storm' who traveled all over Kerala with his tongue and hands raised against injustice.

Abstention Movement (1933-1937)

The Abstention Movement (Nivarthana Prakshobham) is a struggle organized by the Ezhava-Christian-Muslim communities to get fair representation in the Assembly and Government appointments in Travancore. The agitation started against the administrative reforms implemented in Travancore demanding that the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims should be given seats in the Assembly and in office in proportion to their population. The dissatisfied sections of the Ezhava, Muslim and Christian communities joined together and formed the All Travancore Samyuktha Rashtriya Samithi. While social reform movement in other parts of British India had been, on the whole, the work of the enlightened caste Hindus, the abstention were advanced enough to present their own grievances and promote a struggle for their redress. The passing of the legislative Reforms Act, 1932 was the symbol for the beginning of a state wide agitation. The legislative reforms of 1932 made permanent the property qualification. The Ezhavas, the Muslims and the Christians apprehended that the new reforms, would secure for them far less number of seats in the legislature than they were entitled to on a strict population basis. They feared that the Nairs would get more seats than what they really deserved. Therefore these communities demanded that they should be given representation in the legislature in proportion to their numerical strength. The Abstentionists carried on a vigorous agitation all over the state against the new constitutional reforms. It was in connection with the Abstention movement that C. Kesavan delivered his famous speech at Kozhanchery (11 May, 1935).

The government accepted the demands of the agitators at the end of the agitation which provoked the politics of Travancore. To examine the recruitment issue in detail, the government appointed Dr. G.S. D. Knox was appointed Special Officer in 1934. The Special Officer was tasked with studying the feasibility of forming a Public Service Commission for recruitment and submitting a report. Knox was also tasked with classifying people in a way that was convenient for them to regulate community representation. According to a Knox report submitted on March 14, 1935, the government decided to extend the benefit of communal representation to communities with a population of at least 2% of the total population.

About C. Kesavan's Speech

Representatives of Christians met together at Trivandrum in 1932 and formed All Kerala Christian Mahasabha. A special meeting of this was held on May 9-11, 1935 at Kozhanchery. In this meeting T.M. Varghese, proposed that "The elections to the Legislative Assembly of Travancore was not properly held and so it must be dissolved and new elections should be carried out". On the day, May 11, the programme was All Kerala Join Political Meeting, C. Kesavan was a speaker. He had deceived the police and preached against the Diwan in Kozhanchery while the arrest warrant was still in force. He declared "I am talking about Sir. C.P. We don't need that Janthu (animal). The Travancore became notorious after his arrival". This infuriated Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer Diwan (Prime Minister) of Travancore. He was sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500. He was also banned from preaching for two months. To commemorate in this incident a statue of C. Kesavan was erected at the Kozhanchery town.

C. Kesavan's speech at Kozhanchery on May 13, 1935 challenged the monopoly of Nair's enjoyed in general administration. The Kozhanchery speech gave a new energy to our social reform process, our efforts to achieve political freedom and our struggle to realize social equality. C. Kesavan was a mind that reminds open in all directions. We can find the resonances of that in the 'Kozhanchery Address'. There are many incidence and individuals who played a significant role in transforming this land which was described Swami Vivekananda as a lunatic asylum in to modern Kerala. It is among such incidence that the "Kozhanchery Address" figures. It is among first great persons that C. Kesavan figures.

The Kozhanchery Address was also noteworthy for the courageous manner in which C. Kesavan publically challenged Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer IAS repressive rule in Travancore even as it declared the right of subaltern classes and called for a relentless battle to achieve those rights that was why state Congress leader T.M. Varghese described "C. Kesavan the uncrowned king of Travancore". The speech was a step towards the success of the Nivarthana agitation carried out by the backward and backward sections of the people of Travancore.

After Effects of the Speech

Those who thought that the agitation would get worse with the imprisonment of C. Kesavan were wrong. Protests erupted across Travancore. The government was ready to accept all the demands of the Joint Political Committee without exception. The Government meanwhile appointed an a delimitation Commissioner to solve the problem of representation in the legislature with special reference to the Ezhava, Muslim and Latin Catholic the executive committee of the join political congress expressed their satisfaction and withdrew all attempts at an agitation approach. The Nivarthana movement has led to many progressive decisions, including the establishment of the Travancore Public Service Commission and the reservation of posts for backward communities.

Conclusion

C. Kesavan's relentless struggle for bureaucracy has been enjoyed by millions of underprivileged communities in Travancore and later in United Kerala since the late 1930s. His Kozhanchery speech pointed out the need to unite strongly against the aristocracy. His speech was a direct testament to the influence of the Sovereign on the rule of Travancore and his struggle for rights. The essence of the Kozhanchery speech is still intensely touching in the mind. The speech paved the way for the revolt, which was limited to petitions and resolutions, to a flood of open struggle against the monarchy and the Diwan rule. This majestic speech in Kozhanchery, spreading the message of freedom and democracy and challenging the arrogance of the monarchy.

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