



IMPACT OF BUDDHIST CULTURE IN THE SUBALTERN MOVEMENT OF KERALA

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Abstract : Renaissance may begin with one person or a few but it does not end in that few persons, it is a long term process, it still continues. It was Shakyamuni Gautama Buddha who spread Renaissance message among downtrodden section through his democratic and rational approach. When we enquire about the history of ideological and radical revolution of these leaders in Kerala it ends up in the Buddha and his teachings. It was Gautama Buddha , the pioneering democrat in the world through his ethical and egalitarian teachings and practical and compassionate method tried to awaken the society. Who through his ideologies influenced large section of society and made people to realize their dignity .Buddha gave importance to virtuous deeds or good Karma and opposed the caste system, his famous saying, ' its one's own karma that determines whether one is Brahmin or Non-Brahmin' which itself gives a strong basis for his revolutionary praxis. This democratic and rational attitude of Buddha later influenced much of our renaissance leaders, this made subaltern Renaissance possible.

Methodology: The proposed study is interdisciplinary in nature both primary data and secondary data are used for the study

Keywords: Subaltern, Buddhism

INTRODUCTION

Renaissance was a cultural and intellectual movement that began in Italy roughly between A.D.1300 to 1500. Literally Renaissance means rebirth of the freedom to think and act without being controlled by any external agency. It also indicates a revival of the study of ancient Greek and Roman classics. It proclaims the rebirth of ancient classical art and learning. According to Oxford dictionary, “it’s a great revival of art and letters under the influence of classical models which began in Italy in the fourteenth century and continued during fifteenth and sixteenth century also, the period in which the movement was in progress”. Renaissance began in Kerala in the last decades of 19th century and in the beginning of 20th century. Subaltern section in the society had prominent role in undertaking Renaissance in Kerala. Subaltern is a term used to refer to someone of lower rank[as in military] or class[as in caste system].This term was used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in the society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling class. It is used to denote the entire people who are subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any another way. It is the subject position that denotes the subaltern. Here in this study the term subaltern is used to refer to lower castes especially Dalit section in the society who have been severely oppressed in the name of the caste denominations. Renaissance mainly takes place when there is a need to change existing social systems, when the factors remaining in the society becomes unfavorable for its people, when people were unequally treated and when they were severely oppressed. Renaissance in Kerala also had taken place in similar circumstances. When in Italy renaissance began to challenge capitalist class, in India renaissance began to question caste supremacy. Struggle became an immediate need for Subaltern. Subalterns have fought to this day not only by fighting against caste discrimination and severe oppression but also against inequalities that are found in every sphere. This study is an attempt to explore and unravel the Buddhist influence in the ideological revolution of the subaltern section in Kerala Renaissance. Sree Narayana Guru, the visionary of Kerala Renaissance had a sustained Buddhist influence in his philosophical thoughts and articulations. It has inspired his disciples in the long run of Kerala renaissance.

SUBALTERN MOVEMENT AND INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism occupies a unique and basic place in the history of Indian religions. It was developed around 6th century BCE when the Varna divided society created schism among the society. The personality of the Buddha and the method adopted by him to preach his religion helped the spread of Buddhism. Buddha admitted everyone in his Sangha irrespective of caste, creed and gender. Buddha was a rationalist and the first democrat in human history. His Bikshu Sangha took every decision in accordance with majority opinion and majority vote. During the period of the Buddha violence was in its peak, so Buddha gave preference to non-violence and opposed caste system. He envisaged the creation of a new world where everybody is equal. These revolutionary and democratic attitude of Buddha influenced many of our Renaissance leaders.

B.R.Ambedkar, prominent national leader born in a Dalit family was highly influenced by the ideals of the Buddha, which later made him to convert into Buddhism. 'Buddha and His Dhamma' was an important work of Ambedkar, which mainly talks about different stages of Buddha's life. And was emphasizing the ideal that, 'Human beings should be judged on the basis of merit not by birth'.

When we take the case of Kerala Renaissance, Sree Narayana Guru, the visionary of Kerala renaissance, projected the need for rethinking of Kerala's Buddhist history through his highly discerning disciples in the context of Kerala's Modernity and in the beginning of Kerala Renaissance. Guru, the great social reformer who in his entire life waged war against caste violence and bravely resisted the age old traditions and superstitions. He is the first one to propound the concept of 'humanity'. It was the anti-caste ideals of Buddha that influenced the Guru. Narayana Guru was portrayed as "Kerala Buddha" by his disciples. Guru asked people to lead moral life, he got vibrant disciples to make his ideals practical. Guru was publicly questioned by Brahmins for consecrating the idol of god, a rough stone taken from Neyyar and installed at Aruvippuram in 1888. Guru challenged brahminical supremacy by giving a counter answer, 'I have installed Ezhava Shiva'. This counter answer of Guru symbolizes the far reaching ideological revolution about to happen in Kerala. After consecrating many temples from Aruvippuram to Thalassery, Narayana Guru started consecrating mirrors and planks engraved with human ideas. Even though Guru built temples for particular religion, later he openly remarked that "what we want further is not temples but schools and industries". Dewan C.P.Ramaswamy Ayyar in his speech at Trivandrum says, 'Even much before the Harijan upliftment of Gandhi, Sreenarayana Guru propagated the slogan of universal brotherhood among the masses. Even before the entry to Travancore temples, Guru fought against untouchability, caste and rituals. Sreenarayana Guru was a leader not only of Ezhava community but also of all the people of India'.

It is important to mention the followers of Guru who propagated Buddhist Doctrines and their contributions to the Kerala Renaissance. Among them include famous personalities like Sahodaran Ayyappan, C.V. Kujiraman, Kumaranashan, Mitavadi C.Krishnan, Dr.Palpu, E .K Ayyakutty. These social reformers used Buddhist principles as a weapon against Brahmin supremacy and Subaltern oppression.

Sahodaran Ayyappan has rewritten Guru's slogan of 'one caste, one religion, one god for mankind' as "No Caste, No Religion, No God for mankind". C.V.Kujiraman, the founding editor of Kerala Kaumudi, is one of the disciples of Narayana Guru who had close affinity towards Buddhism

Great Poet Kumaran Asan an important figure in Kerala renaissance Deriving inspiration from Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia' Ashan wrote *Sree Buddhacharitam* but could not complete it. His "*Karuna*" and "*Chandalabikshuki*" are directly related with Buddhism.

Much before Sree Narayana Guru, 'Vaikunta Swamikal' initiated the Renaissance struggle among the Channar Nadar communities of South Kerala. He challenged Brahminical Supremacy by questioning, why untouchables are not permitted to wear dress beyond waist, this

came to be known as Channar Lahala. 'Poikayil Yohannan', who strived for the liberation of the dalits in central Travancore also established PRDS in 1910. In 1852, thirty six years before the consecration at Aruvippuram in 1888, under the leadership of 'Arattupuzha Velayudha Panickar' a temple was consecrated in Mangalam in Arattupuzha near Kayamkulam. Vaikunta Swamikal and Velayudha Panicker have prominent role in influencing Guru's revolutionary thought and radical social transformation.' Thykkad Ayyav 'a disciple of Vaikunta Swamikal and the Yoga teacher of Chattambi swamikal and Guru, provided the orientation towards Renaissance. 'Chattambi swamikal' great renaissance leader who questioned Brahminical supremacy through his innovative and logical argumentation was a close elder of the Guru. His theories greatly contributed for the reformation of the society. 'Ayyankali', eventhough born in a well economic background his caste banner made him to suffer. Sree narayana Guru's Aruvippuram consecration influenced Ayyankali, he adopted several revolutionary means to challenge caste supremacy. His 'Villuvanti Struggle [1898] and 'Kallumala Agitation' had great historical importance. Gandhi called him as the "King of Pulayas". 'Vagbhatananda', who fought against superstitions, idolatory, caste system and did much for the upliftment of depressed classes, his Atmavidyasagnham is a best example for this. 'E.M.S. Namboodirippad' records in his manual titled "Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi", 'though not famous like Sree Narayana Guru, vagbhatananda too has played great role in reforming the society'. 'Subhananda Guru', born in paraya family was greatly influenced by Guru had contributed for the renaissance.

There are so many leaders like V.T.Bhattathripad, A.R.Rajraja Varma, Ramavarma Thamban, Swadeshbhimani K.Ramakrishna Pillai, P.S. Warriar, Vakkom Abdul Khadir Moulavi, M.C. Joseph, Moyyarath Sankaran, K.Kelappan, Swami Agamananda, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, A.K.Goplan, Vedabandu, E.M.S Namboothrippad, Joseph Mundassery, P. Krishna Pillai, Swantantra Samudayam Madhavan, Dr. Velukutty Arayan.etc had greatly contributed for Kerala Renaissance. It is impossible to study renaissance without their contributions. When caste supremacy was much high in 19th and 20th centuries, Renaissance leaders with Buddhist affiliation and Buddhist historical background greatly influenced Subaltern section in the society. It was quite possible for them to get inspired by Buddha's teachings because nowhere in the world has this kind of a religion where everybody is treated as equal at least in principles.

CONCLUSION

Today, in a democratic set up where man is protected from every kind of inequalities and atrocities, it is important to study about a period in which man was discriminated, exploited, oppressed because of his caste. It was Subaltern leaders with renaissance message who transformed such pathetic society. When we enquire about the history of radical and ideological revolution of these leaders, it ends up in Buddha. It was Gautama Buddha, the master of ethics with his enlightened teachings and practical methods tried to awaken the society. Who through his ideologies influenced larger sections of society and made people to realize their human dignity. Buddha gave importance to Karma and opposed caste system, it's one own karma which determines whether he is Brahmin or Non-Brahmin. This democratic and rational attitude of

Buddha later influenced much of our Renaissance leaders this made Subaltern Renaissance possible

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