



Social Approaches Of Muthuramalinga Thevar

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ABSTRACT

Muthuramalinga Thevar was a social reformer. Both social reform and economic liberation were closely linked with political freedom. The social reform could not be achieved without political freedom. He shaped his character and personality honesty and braveness molded him as a social reformer. Sati, infanticide, child marriage, untouchability, illiteracy and castism were condemned by him. He believed in morality, equality, justice, love and service to God. Thevar also participated Temple entry movement, farmers struggle and fight for the protector of women.

Keyword: Social wisdom and his reforms to eradicate the evils – sati, infanticide, child marriage, untouchability, illiteracy and castism – temple entry struggles, boycott of Toddy shops.

INTRODUCTION

A true leader as a model for others due to his uncorrupt public services. His practical and **social wisdom** and its **knowledge** and **selflessness** encouraged him to execute things undertaken by him with all seriousness and effectiveness.¹ They caused him success at all levels. Such personal trails were obtained by him his own experiences. A **service minded man** never hesitated to fight for their legal rights. So throughout his life he served others with all promptness and it was mainly due to his broad based social and spiritual approaches. In general that person is a **realist**. Religious unity and solidarity social services is her life wish.²

Muthuramalinga Thevar was not only a political leader, but also a social reformer. He was a genius. Thevar quoted that “**one who lives for others sake is a perfect man, one who lives for partly himself and partly for others is an average man (selfless) and one who lives for himself alone is an unjust man**”.³ Both social reform and economic liberation were closely linked with political freedom. The social reform could not be achieved without political freedom. His family condition made him a simple hermit.⁴ Hence, he was a serious person from his early days. Hence, he determined to dedicate his whole life for the society. Having interested in social reform propaganda, first he equipped himself for the purpose.⁵ He shaped his character and personality. His honesty,

integrity and braveness molded him as a social reformer. Thevar took active interest in reforming the society. He was a witness to the multifaceted problems of his village. He served them relentlessly not as a Communist, but as talk not of the high and the low. Let us all meet on the high platform of humanity".⁶ This was the clarion call to the children of his land. Besides, **Thevar outlines an ideal man**. A mighty intellect, a great probity, a profound learning and a warm love, a deep piety and steadfast faith in God – these qualities that really mark a nobleman. Children who are fed on these noble ideals cannot but be our future noble citizens. In Vinayagar he describes the patience and endurance of the devotees who await the grace of the lord. It may be long delayed. It is like the slow growth and unfolding of a seed yet they never lose hope.⁷ Thevar was able to bear all the burdens of life in a calm collected state of mind for his faith in God was deeply rooted. He was so full of devotion that he wanted to chant the name of the lord with his eyes bedewed with the tears of love⁸.

The strong personalities attached to these organizations refined in Hinduism and tried to **eradicate the evils** in the society in the name of Hinduism. They opened the door of salvation for everyone without any distinction of caste and creed, maximally; **Sir William Jones** and **Charles Wilkinss** infused new life and vigour into Hinduism and propagated it abroad.⁹ The visit of swami **Vivekananda** to U.S.A and Europe had lasting effect. At the same time he condemned the religious superstitions and narrow mindedness openly. So that the simple and open Hinduism might not be influenced by any other external religious movement.¹⁰ **Sati, infanticide, Purdha child marriage, untouchability, illiteracy** and **casteism** were condemned by the socio- religious reformers. Their influences reformed both the religion and society which were infested with various evils. Thevar was not against the Hindu religion. He had an idea to strengthen Hindu religion on the basis of spirituality. He believed in **morality, equality justice, love and service to God**¹¹

Temple entry movement

Generally the Hindu temples played an important role in South Indian history, in culture, society and economies. Hindus were idol worshipers. So, each and every village has at least one small Hindu temple. Like this each and every caste and race has temples.¹² There are some big temples that attracted thousands of people in a day. Some were allowed to enter the temple and some were restricted from doing so. The temples acquired wealth from the kings and merchants by way of donations.¹³ Many peasants were dependant on the temple lands. The temples conduct regular **pujas**, and celebrate colourful ceremonies and festivals. They maintained cattle and other animals. They patronize arts and educational institution.¹⁴ The priests were affluent in the colonial society. Temples were makers and breakers of status. They even improved the economic position and social status of the priests. The discrimination of the people in the Hindu temple was condemned by **Saint Ramanujar** and others during the medieval period. But, the Brahmanism fostered such discrimination.¹⁵

The members of the Nadar community were also prevented from entering into the temples on the grounds that they indulge in the profession like '**toddy tapping**' which was considered one of the **Panchama Pathagam**.¹⁶ The suppressed people felt that it was their duty to free themselves from the tyranny of custom masquerading in the name of religion. The Nadar temple entry movements held in places like **Kamudhi** and **Ramnad** were brought to the notice of the Privy Council but desired judgment was not received. The Hindu social reformers became aware of the evil of the Hindu temples and tried to set rights things. But, reformers like **E.V.Ramasamy Periyar** went to the extent of saying that it is better to ignore Hindu temples which were the source if Hinduism. Thevar took steps to remove the discrimination shown to Harijans in the Hindu temples.¹⁷ Thevar clearly said that E.V.Ramaswamy Periyar saying would lead to the damage to Hindu institutions and Hindu religion.

Thevar tried to improve the Harijans social and economic position. There was a conflict between upper caste and Harijans over the temple entry issue. Thevar tried to solve it. He rightly educated the people to believe in equality before the eyes of God and that he was always with the poor depressed, downtrodden and the backward people.¹⁸

On 8th July 1939 a group of depressed class community inclusive of one Nadar, under the President ship of Vaidyanatha Iyer and the **support of Pasumpom Muthuramalinga Thevar** entered the **Meenakshi Amman at Madurai** on July 8th 1939. Thus Thevar was a great social reformer and universalist, who always wished to uplift the weaker sections. Thevar's struggle for their cause instilled in them confidence and courage and they moved forward steadily.

The vast Indian sub-continent was known for its successful permeation in democratic ideals. It was also because of the growth of the society on the basis of socialistic principles. Though there were many ups and downs due to social, political and economic reasons, the people and leaders were for unity and uniformity among all on the basis of socialistic ideologies.¹⁹ The greater happiness of the greatest number was to be achieved through the attainment of maximum benefits for all. On par with this principle **Muthuramalinga Thevar** endeavoured to establish a **socialistic society** with the growth of agricultural improving economics.²⁰ So, he concentrated to achieve socialism by improving the standards of living of the agrarian laboures and Industrial workers.

Muthuramalinga Thevar was playing a leading role among farmers as well as workers. He could not distinguish between the owners and workers.²¹ Through his powers as a member of legislature, as a labour leader, as a sympathizer of labour unions and guilds he stood for the economic affluence of all.²² He undertook all efforts on the basis of just and right causes and never arrived at any hasty conclusions in promoting the concept of socialism.

Protector of Woman

Thevar had not had the fortune to address with love and affection the woman who had given birth to him as “**Mother**” as he had lost her at a very tender age. He looked upon every woman as his own mother. He reacted with explosive anger whenever a woman was harassed, humiliated or dishonoured in any manner. He would never rest until justice was rendered to the affected woman. Abhiramam is a small town at a distance of five miles from Pasumpon, where Thevar was born. A large number of Muslims lived here. Many of them were wealthy because of the income from their employment abroad. Wednesday was the weekly market but the market was in a Muslim-dominated.

Poor women from the neighboring villages used to come to the market to sell dry cotton sticks, buttermilk, cucumber, milk, etc. Young women from many places nearby also frequented the market for the weekly purchase of essential items for their homes. Some of the Muslim boys used to tease these women, who came to sell their goods or make their own purchase, by using quibbles with suggestive and often sexual overtones. Sometimes the women felt their modesty outraged by the provocative actions and words of the Muslim youths. Many elders enjoyed such depraved behaviour of the boys and treated them casually as a source of fun and frolic. These women know that they could never expect the support of the elderly men from that area. So, they brought their grievances to Thevar for redressal.

Thevar was angry, but managed to hide the simmering agitation. He closed the eyes for a second. When he opened his eyes he found the men sitting around waiting eagerly for green signal from him to take quick remedial action against the eve teasers. Thevar told them “**Do not be in a hurry**. We can solve this matter ourselves if the accused are Hindus. But they are Muslims. If we

openly show our anger it could lead to a **Hindu Muslim hostility**. Therefore, this has to be solved in a different way”.

As a consequence of it, there was a big uprising of workers in Madurai in the year 1938-1939. As a first step the Pasumalai Mahalakshmi Mills workers' union was formed and Thevar was elected as its leader. Then was Madurai cotton mills workers' union and the knitting company workers' union were formed and Thevar was elected as leader of all these unions.

There was some dispute between the owners of the Madurai Mahalakshmi mills and the workers of the mills. The management refused the demands of the workers. Thevar participated in the negotiations between the management and the representative of the two thousand workers of the mills. Communist leader Jeevanandham was also there along with Thevar. As the management continued to be adamant in its stand, the workers' union decided to 'strike'. The strike in Mahalakshmi mills was the first one in the history of the workers' movement in Madurai.

Thevar as the leader of the workers' union was arrested in connection with the strike of the workers of the Mahalakshmi mills on 15th of October 1938 and imprisoned. Thevar was sentenced to six months of rigorous imprisonment accusing him of instigating the workers to strike work. As there was a lot of agitation among the people against the imprisonment of Thevar. The management of the Mahalakshmi mills agreed to accept the demands of the workers and the workers' union came out of the dispute successfully.²³

Thevar the learner of farmers

Thevar was a big farmer and a 'pattadhar' under the Ramnad Zamindari who owned thirty two and half villages under Zahiradar Maniam with one lakh Palmyra trees. He had every knowledge of the sufferings of the farmers under zamindari system. Hence, for the welfare of the farmers of the zamindari Thevar formed an association in the name of zamindari land owners Association. Thus Thevar received a lot of enthusiasm by the farmers.

Boycott of toddy shops

As part of the fight against the anti-imperialist laws, boycott of toddy shops was conducted all over India in every nook and corner of the country. The persons who participated in the boycott were brutally beaten by the police resulting in serious bleeding injuries all over their bodies including skulls. Boycott of toddy shops were conducted in Mudukulathur area also. At that time, Thevar who went to the Kumarayya temple in Kodumalur village was staying in the house of the village munsiff. The persons who participated in the boycott of toddy shops in Kodumalur village were not only severely beaten by the police inflicting bleeding injuries, but also tied with ropes in the legs of the persons and dragged them along the streets. Some people informed Thevar about this brutal inhuman treatment to those who participated in the boycott of the toddy shops by the police.

Thevar sent words of the police, that the police could take action against the persons engaged in boycotting the toddy shops by arresting them and putting them in prisons but should not beat them inflicting bleeding injuries and drag them on the streets by tying with ropes in their legs. When the messenger conveyed Thevar's request to the police the police asked "Who is this Thevar to give orders to me?" and spoke about Thevar in an insulting manner. The people who had assembled there could not tolerate themselves after listening to the insulting remarks made by the police on Thevar, surrounded the police, took away their guns, beat them severely and drove them away. This incident created restlessness among the police personnel there. Prejudiced against the incident the police

thought it was due to the instigation of Thevar and in order to prosecute a case against Thevar, as the first accused. They caught hold of the Kodumalur village munsiff and manhandled him severely. The police asked him to accept that it was Thevar who instigated the people to attack the police, which he refused. In this malice he was left off with his village Munsiff post. The members of his family were also subjected to the brutal treatment of the police in the presence of the village munsiff.²⁴

In spite of all these efforts by the police the village munsiff refused to give a statement as wanted by the police. He had refused to say anything, which Thevar did not say, even if the police cut his body into pieces. Then the police gave up their idea of filling a case against thevar as the first accused but concocted a case with others as an accused. The police could not recover the guns, which were taken away from police and reproduce them in the court as evidence. Thereafter the case was dismissed by the court.

End Notes

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⁴ Jeeva Bharathi.K., Pasumpon Thevarin Kaatturaigal, Chennai, p. 192.

⁵ Perumal.A.R., Mudisuda Mannar Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevarin Veerra Varalaru, Chennai, 1964, p. 4431.

⁶ Vaithilinggaam.S.T., Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar., Chennai, 2012,

⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

8.Bose.K., Forward Bloc, Madras, 1988, p. 81

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20.Ibid.

21. Vaithilinggaam.S.T.,Op.cit.,p. 34-41

22.Ibid

23.Ibid.,p.19-23

24.Ibid.