



THE SAMARASA SUDDHA SANMARAGA MOVEMENT IN -TAMIL NADU DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY AD

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Abstract

A notable contemporary of Ramakrishna in South India was **Ramalingaswami**,¹ a saint on the old model and a prolific hymnist in Tamil. He had little learning, and poetry was his natural gift which he employed to translate his vision of God to the world.² He was grieved at sectarian differences and was a staunch advocate of the path of harmony. At Vadalur in South Arcot, the place of his birth, he built a shrine in which the flame of an oil lamp was the only object of worship.³ He established the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Movement.

This movement was one of the most important factors in the religious history of the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu. It was spiritual in its content but it had its own overtones in the field of social reform also.⁴ It was not only a new religion but also a new spiritual movement with due emphasis on social problems. It wanted everyone not to confine themselves within the limits of anyone religion but to rise to such high spiritual realms, as to shed all differences of caste, creed, religion, nationality and to experience the ultimate reality.⁵

Saint Ramalingar attacked the caste system more vehemently than other religionists or spiritualists of the previous ages. He refused to accept the theory of the high and the low to be distinguished by the colour of the skin. _____

He branded the caste distinctions as childish plays and condemned books that suggested and advocated divisions within religions and castes, as rubbish.⁶ He understood fully well the fact that if social reform was to be permanent it should be based on religion also. He took up religious reform as his mainstay and gave the world a new universal religion which never accepted distinction among human beings.⁷ He attacked the caste system chiefly on the ground that it was against the principle of integration of all souls through love. It was not an exaggeration to say that with the Sanmarga Movement, the social awakening of the Modern Tamil Nadu began.

Sanmaragam may be split into sat and Margam. Sat means "Truth" Margam means "Path". The latter also means creed. Saiva Siddhanata speaks of four path ways to God. In Vedanta also we find them. They are Dhasa Margam, Sathputhra Margam, Saha margam and Sanmargam. They are equated with Cariyai, Kriyai, Yogam and Gnanam.⁸ The saint was worried at the poverty prevalent in the society. Hence, he launched a project to eradicate hunger from the Tamil society. He founded the Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sangam in 1865.⁹

The word 'Samarasa' indicates the universality of its nature and the society was open to everyone irrespective of caste, colour and creed. He established the Satya Dharmasalai on the 23rd of May 1867 at Vadaloor,¹⁰ a small village in the South Arcot district'. Then he established the 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sabai' in 1872. The method of worship at the Gnana Sabai, as laid down by the saint was novel.¹¹ No distinction based on caste was evinced in offering worship and even the person who was to officiate the worship inside the sanctum of the Sabai was selected not on the basis of caste but on the basis of his pure life. He had to forgo meat eating and killing of animals.¹² Accompaniment of musical instruments, offering of edibles, and distribution of sacred remnants which were invariably adopted in all other denominations were absent here.

The Sanmarga Movement stood for only one God. He should be worshipped in the form of Effulgence of Light with true love. Petty gods and deities should not be worshipped. For that remembrance he lighted a lamp at Vadalur Asramam. Meat should not be eaten. Sacrifice of living creatures should not be performed in the name of these gods. No difference of caste, religion, sect, etc. should be observed. Every life should be held in as much regard as one's own life on the basis of Universal brotherhood. The Universal brotherhood is extended to animals and even to plants. Feeding the hungry is the key to the kingdom of Heaven. The dead should not be cremated, but should be buried, which is the Dravidian culture. All superstitious beliefs, customs and practices should be given up.¹³

Of course, there were many in the religious firmament of India who had put forward lofty ideals of humanitarianism and brotherhood as equal as Saint Ramalingar. But the distinction of saint Ramalingar was that he alone from within established institutions started movements to carry out those ideals into practice. He was not only a lord of renaissance but also an executor of reformation.¹⁴ He happened to be a non-Brahmin by birth, which added more weight. He disappeared mysteriously in 1874 and people believed that he may come back. His hymns are still very popular.

St.Ramalingam claimed that he had experience all this four margams separately. These four paths are usually mixed in various ways and proportions. St. Ramalingam comes as a ripe fruit in the Tamil tradition of sanmarga and preceding him where St. Thirumoolar (bud), St. Manickavacagar (flower) and St. Tayumanavar (tender fruit). St. Ramalingam's conception of sanmargam is holistic and revolutionary and is quite needed for our trouble age.

St.Ramalingam's concept of Sanmargam on the one hand is evolution and culmination of the Tamil Sanmarga tradition but on the other hand it transcends this tradition and achieves something quite different. St.Thirumoolar St.Manickavacagar and thayumanavar , inspite of their loyalty to their religious sect and establishment. In Tamil there are two words of Religion "Samayam" and "madam". The former denotes Religion with all its lofty vision but the latter denotes religion in its narrow sense including loyalty to the sect, establishment, etc. St.Ramalingam certainly belongs to the former. It has been calculated that St.Ramalingam mentions the concept of sanmaragam in 210 contexts with 23 different names. He gave a new meaning for the four margams.¹⁵

Dhasa Margam -Becoming a servant, a slave to the creatures.Satputhra Margam - Becoming a son to all living creatures.SahaMarga -Lookingupon all creatures as friends and looking upon himself as a friend of all creatures.San Margam -

Looking upon the lives of all creatures as his own life.¹⁶ St.Ramalingam mentions ndriyaOzhukkam", "Karana Ozhukkam.", "Jeeva Ozhkkam" and "Anma Ozhukkam" at the four codes of conduct of Sanmargam. St.Ramalingam also mentions two instruments for Sanmargam. "Indriya Ozhukkam" is considered under two heads, "Kanmendriya Ozhukkam" and "Gnanedriya Ozhukkam".¹⁷ This mainly includes the control of the senses and using them for the right purpose. Listen to the right sound and right words and refuse to listen to bag things; Speak sweet words and do not utter harsh words and lies and do not aspire for taste; Do not see bad things but when a jeevan is put to sufferings prevent it by any means; visit places where periyor (wise elders) stay and move about to help jeevans ;

Leave the excretions in due quantity in right ways by taking proper diet, living in correct physical conditions using medical herbs and yoga techniques.

Karana Ozhukkam has been defined thus: Realize that there is only one true God. Concentrate your mind on the Citsabai where lord siva dances .Do not judge others ; Do not have pride ; Avoid Evil artificial means and be on your own natural rhythm; Do not be angry with anyone ; Control your mind from going to evils ;¹⁸ Do not involve yourself in excessive and wrong sexual relations. “Jeeva Ozhukkam” mean transcending the narrow differences and divisions of caste, religion, varnam, kotra, kulam, sastras, notion of high and low and considering everyone as equals.¹⁹

“Anma Ozhukkam” means showing mercy for all living creatures realizing that the atman is the Hall where God resides and its very light itself is God and functioning in Totality.²⁰ They are Paropakaram and Satvicarma. The former means helping the jeevans with ons’s body, actions, sense and wealth. In addition, praying in purity of body, mind and soul. The latter continues enquiry about God and soul, submitting our limitations and defects to God.²¹ St.Ramalingam not only implemented his concepts in his own life and served as a living example for his philosophy, but he also established a new institution called “Suddha Sanmarga Sangam” and created a new People’s Movement for spreading the idea of Sanmargam.²²

St.Ramalingam proclaims:

“Let rule without compassion quickly finish

And Man of Grace on the good path regain

Let the virtuous with wisdom have divine

Prosperity according to their wish

Let all live in harmony thinking benevolently”.

This is a significant verse, where St. Ramalingam rejects the rule of the mighty forthwith. He says that he is frightened by those who deviate from the path of Sanmargam. He has described such people as gang without impartiality, king without mercy, wretches of petty authority who daily think of nothing but evil doing and people of the worst kind who speak nothing but lies.²³ He has written a

prose treatise on Manuniti Cholan by name Manumurai Kanda Vachagam. Manuniti Cholan of mythical fame attempted to do justice to the cow which lost its calf under the wheel of the chariot of his own son. He wanted his kingdom to be a kingdom which would do justice even to non- human.²⁴

End Notes and References

1. Ulaganatha Padithar, *Sathi Ethu Vilakkam*, P. 17.
2. *Ibid.*, p.18.
3. Vanmikanthan, *G. Pathway to God Trow by Ramlinga Swamigal* p. 412.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 743.
5. *Ibid.*,
6. Ma. Po.Si. *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, p.9.
8. *Ibid.*,p. 12.
9. *Thirunelveli Savia Siddhanta Manattu malar*, Tirunelveli, 1929, p. 24.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.
11. Ma.Po.Si *opc.it.*, p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
13. *Ibid.*,
14. *Tiruarutpa, uraninadaippakuthi*, p. 300,
15. *Ibid.*,
16. Vanmikanthan, G., *op c.it.*, pp. 738.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 739.

18. *Ibid.*,

19. *Ibid.*,

20. *Tiruarutpa, Urainadaippakuthi*, op.cit, pp. 300-303.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 308-311.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

23. *Ibid.*, p.313.

24. *Ibid.*,