



Political Biography of Manjeri Rama Iyar

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INTRODUCTION

Biography is a detailed description of a person's life. It involves more than just basic facts like education, work, relationships, and death; it portrays a person's experience of these life events. Manjeri Rama Iyar was the influential leader of national movement. Rama Iyar's ancestors migrated to Manjeri from Thanjavur and added Manjeri as family name. Rama Iyar practised as Advocate and later he attracted to national movement. He has close connection with AnnieBesant's Theosophical society and became the forefront of political activities. His active presence of 1920 Manjeri political conference was very significant. So it is important to trace out life period and activities of Rama Iyar in the forefront of society. It is crucial to take leadership of a movement in the very local region of Malabar. He became the one of the most influential figure in the history of Malabar. At the same time there is no much efforts to study about the activities of Manjeri Rama Iyar was taken place. The local people of Manjeri still ignorant about this great personality. There is no efforts to remember him as a freedom fighter in the native of Manjeri. The historical background of his political activities is very significant. It is a humble effort to make a historical biography of Manjeri Rama Iyar.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation focusing on the importance of Manjeri Rama Iyar in the freedom struggle and his contributions to the national movement. As an influential figure Manjeri Rama Iyar played an enormous role in the national movement. It analyses how theosophical society came to Malabar and role of Manjeri Rama Iyar in the activities of Theosophical society, and the leadership of Rama Iyar in the Manjeri political Conference. At the same time how Manjeri Political conference helped the Mapila peasants into the forefront of the freedom struggle (Khilafat Movement).

OBJECTIVES

- To trace out the biographical sketch of Manjeri Rama Iyar.
- To find out the leadership of Rama Iyar in the Manjeri political conference.
- To analysis Rama Iyar's involvement in social issues during his period.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation analysis intellectual history of Manjeri Rama Iyar. It is important to place the life period of Manjeri Rama Iyar and the historical significance of this period. It locates how Theosophical Society influenced the local people and how Rama Iyar became the forefront of the Theosophical Society. At the same time, it analysis the leadership of Rama Iyar in the Manjeri Political conference. This project will help to get more information about Rama Iyar and his role in the national movement.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

1. How Rama Iyar became influential figure in the national movement?
2. How important the role played by Rama Iyar in Theosophical Society?
3. Weather Rama Iyar attracted common people into the freedom struggle?

HYPOTHESIS

- Rama Iyar gave impetus to the national movement in Malabar.
- Rama Iyar played influential role in the Manjeri Political Conference

METHODOLOGY

Historical research methodology was used for this study. The primary and secondary sources also used for this study.

SOURCE

Both primary and secondary sources are used to collect the information about the topic. The primary sources include Gazetteers (Fort. St. George Gazattee), newspapers, and interviews. The secondary source includes various literature works.

EARLY LIFE

Manjeri Rama Iyar was born at Manjeri on 5 July 1877. He was the son of advocate Manjeri Sundaram Iyar and Lekshmi Ammal. It is believed that Rama Iyer's ancestors were settled in Varagur in Tanjaore and then they migrated into Palakkad in the year 964 A. D. Later they moved into Manjeri and settled there. They adopted the title 'Manjeri' with their name. It was during the period of Rama Iyar their centre of activity shifted into Calicut. He was one of the most renowned advocates during that period and actively participated in the freedom struggle. Defended Annie Besant in the Coimbatore National Flag case and Dr. Choyi in a sensational pollution case and got them acquitted. He was one of the founders of the Theosophical Society in Malabar and served as secretary of Kerala Theosophical society for several years.

He studied Malayalam and Sanskrit from Ezhuthu Pallikkoodam, Manjeri. He was educated at Manjeri Lower Secondary School, Kozhikode Vidya Shala (now Guruvayoorappan College) and Madras. After completing his education from Guruvayurappan College, he joined in the Madras Christian College. He got his law degree in 1898. He was a genius student during the academic years. Before entering as a Advocate in Kozhikode Court he worked as lecturer in Guruvayurappan College. Later he worked as Vice Principal and Principal there.

Rama Iyar belongs to an orthodox upper middle class Brahmin family. He forced to marry at very tender age. In 1902 at the age of fourteen he married nine-year-old Annapoorni Ammal, daughter of Manjeri Subrahmanya Iyer. Rama Iyar have three sons and two daughters. They are Lekshmi Ammal, Kamalambal, Subrahmaniam, Ganapathy and Appa Mama.

Rama Iyar enrolled himself as a lawyer in the Malabar District Court Calicut in 1899. He worked as an advocate at the Madras High Court, High court Vakil at Travancore and chief Vakil at Cochin. Always appearing on the defense side, Rama Iyar was a terror to the prosecution witnesses, especially police officers they should be confused and perplexed with his cross examination as well as his arguments. He worked as a criminal lawyer for more than thirty years in Malabar.

He considered his profession as a moral responsibility towards society. He had appeared cases related with caste and untouchability without receiving any fees. He had appeared in many sensational cases and saved many from going to the gallows. Coimbatore National Flag case was one of such sensational case. This case was related with Besant. Besant, Arundale and B. P Wadia were arrested by police in the name of participating in Home Rule agitation. They were imprisoned in a Bungalow where they hoisted the flag of Home Rule. Its colour was red and green. Police considered this act as a

provocation against government and take it as a case. In this case Rama Iyer appeared for Besant in the court and after a long cross examination got her acquitted.

Rama Iyar was well versed in religion, Philosophy, law, literature, education, History, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics . He was an important leader who was in the forefront of the freedom struggle. Rama Iyar was a multi talented man who was interested in literature and also good at public speaking .He was a publicist, journalist, and worked as an editor of an English weekly called West Coast Spectator. It was started by Puvodan Raman Vakil in 1885 under the title Malabar Spectator and later it was changed into West Coast Spectator. It was published from Calicut. During this period he actively wrote Articles on relevant issues in this weekly.

Rama Iyar was co author with Manjeri Rama Krishna Iyar a book on Buddhism in Malayalam entitled Buddha Dharmam (1927) which explained the history and relevance of Buddhism in Kerala. Rama Iyar was also an editor of a Malayalam journal called Sanathana Dharmam started on 8 May 1911. Its first editor was Thelappurath Narayanan Nambi. It is an official journal of Theosophical Society in Kerala. The main purpose of Sanathana Dharmam was to propagate Theosophy and other religious matters. Rama Iyer who supervise in the functions of this journal for first twelve years. It was published from Calicut till 1923 and later its publication was shifted into Alapuzha. One rupee fixed as its fees and remaining expenditure was carried out by Rama Iyar, Journal published several articles, book reviews, Malayalam translations of speeches made by Besant, translation of english works of eminent authors, poems of Kumaran Asan, Vallathol, annual reports of Theosophical Society etc... The publication of Sanathana Dharmam was stopped in the year 1933 due to increasing expenditure to running the journal and also popularity of other journal like Muthrubhumi and Malayala Rajim.

Rama Iyar acted as a scout commissioner. Scout movement was launched by Bedan Pawell, an English soldier in 1907 at England. It was introduced in India by the British government but it was not open to the Indian students. This situation was effectively used by Besant to win the support of the Indians by demanding the opening of the scout movement for the Indian people. In 1917 she formed Indian Scout Association which was located at Madras and Besant started a journal called the Indian Scout for the propagation of scout movement. It was Theosophists who laid the foundation stone of the scout movement in Kerala. Its launching ceremony was held at Annie Hall in Calicut and its main organizers were Rama Iyer and V. K. Krishna Menon. Rama Iyar was District Scout Commissioner of Malabar for a long time and he organized several camps. The main motto of the scout movement was

teaching obedience to the colonial raj among the youth who were moving towards revolutionary activities against the Raj by this time. The early workers of Theosophy were closely attached to the scout movement in different parts of India especially in Kerala.

RAMA IYAR AND SOCIAL REFORM ACTIVITIES IN MALABAR

Rama Iyer was one among the early founders of the Theosophical Society in Malabar. Theosophical Society was a socio religious reform movement. The word 'theosophy' has been constituted by combining two Greek words 'theos' which means 'God' and Sophia means 'Knowledge of God'. The Society was founded by H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott in New York in 1875. The founders arrived in India in January 1879 and established headquarters at Adyar. It preached universal brotherhood of men irrespective of caste, creed, race/sex and it uphold the virtues of Hinduism¹⁸. The most dynamic and energetic figure among theosophists in India was Annie Besant. In 1888 she joined the Society and with the arrival of Besant in India she could become the president of the Society. Her aim was to spiritual revival of India as against the materialistic ideas of the west being preached in India by the English educated. Her enthusiastic preaching strengthened Hindu pride in their religion and culture. It was severely criticised and condemned by European missionaries. The educated youth of India who face an identity crisis turned to Theosophical Society.

In Malabar, the missionary attacks on Hinduism was resisted by theosophists. Theosophical Society well known in Malabar as Brahma Vidya Sangh. The Theosophists emphasis on human brotherhood irrespective of caste attracted the educated people including the advanced elites. Manjeri Rama Iyer, Nilambur Manavedan Raja, E. B. Hill, Tiyya leader like C. Krishnan, M. Kumaran, Rarichan Moopan etc... were prominent theosophists in Malabar.

Among the socio religious reform movements, the Theosophical Society entered first in Malabar. It reached in Kerala even before Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Rama Krishna Mission. The branches of Brahma Vidya Sangh were known as lodge. The first lodge in Kerala was organized at Palakkad on 24. November 1882. Olcott opened a lodge at Trivandrum on July 1883. There were fifty-eight Theosophical lodges in Kerala.

In Malabar, Asoka Sankara Theosophical Lodge was forerunner among the lodges which is situated at Annie Hall in Calicut. It was Bamblasserri Ravunni Menon who took the initiative for the foundation of the lodge. He invited Narayanan Swami Iyer, a prominent Theosophist to propagate the ideas of

theosophy. As a result, several personalities of Calicut were attracted into theosophy. On 5 March 1902 Sankaracharya Lodge came into existence. But more than one year the lodge worked without a permanent building. Kallingal Madathil Rarichan Moopan, an affluent land owner and chieftain of Cabaut who donated his land to the lodge and the lodge was constructed in that place. Besant inaugurated the lodge on 23 January 1904. Apart from Sankaracharya Lodge. C. Krishnan founded another lodge called Asoka Lodge at Paran Square in the year 1913. Later Asoka Lodge and Sankaracharya Lodge were merged together and formed Asoka Sankara Theosophical Lodge.

Rama Iyar played a crucial role in coordinating different branches of Brahmagvidya Sangh in Kerala in order to form Kerala Theosophical Federation. In 1895 all Indian Branches of Brahmagvidya Sangh merged together to form an organization called Indian Section. It was directly administered by a general secretary centered at Varanasi. Its activities include collection of membership fees, sending section magazines to the members. There were no relationship between the different lodges. Gradually annual sessions of South Indian Lodges were summoned. Its next step was to formation of federations on linguistic basis. It was Rama Iyar who first time stressed need for decentralisation of section's authority into regional level.

Rama Iyar gave and shape to a League of Liberal Brahmins which ultimately became Bharat Samaj with branches all over India. It is an organization which fought against caste rigidity. Along with C. Krishnan, Rama Iyar started a crusade to emancipate the downtrodden section of the society. C. Krishnan was a prominent lawyer in Calicut and he was owner of a daily called Mitavadi, Krishnan belongs to Tiyya community. Tiyyas were most numerous among the Hindu community in Malabar. During the early period of English education the only community which was enthusiastic to undergo the new system was Tiyya community in Malabar. The British occupation and the subsequent economic activities made that community in these European centers an emerging middle class. They turned to English education and developed themselves as a professional group. But socially these communities occupied lowest position and lived in the midst of untouchability. They tried to obtain ritual status and strug 31/48 against the caste rigidity. The elite of this community believed that British had actually helped them to obtain a better standing in society, so they did not want to go against them. Further they feared that upper caste dominated congress must revive castism if they won and would destroy their privileges”.

The prominent Tiyya elites like C. Krishnan worked for the upliftment of his community. Rama Iyer gave full support to Krishnan and along with him Rama Iyer travelled in the company of polluting castes attended their marriage ceremonies and convened Mishrabhojanam. As a result of breaking custom by participating in public in inter caste dinners for which his whole family was subjected to severe social ostracism by the orthodox elements. Rama Iyer was first Brahmin in Kerala to be outcasted in participating struggle against caste.

KNAPP COMMISSION AND RAMA IYAR

A.R. Knapp was appointed by the British Government to investigate the Wagon Tragedy incident. Manjeri Rama Iyer, who was a member of the Knapp Commission, wrote a note about the brutality that shook his conscience. With Rama Iyer there were other members like Mankada Krishna Varma Raja, Kalladi Moideen Kutty. In 1922, the Knapp Commission submitted its report, but it was accused of trivializing the Wagon tragedy and creating loopholes for the culprits to escape. Countering the arguments of the British heads of the commission and their supporters, Rama Iyer made his own account of all the major events that might have taken place in Wagon. Punishment to be given to those responsible for this atrocity was also indicated. These dissenting notes to the commission report can be seen as revealing his courage to speak the truth fearlessly.

The worst Incident of the 1921 Malabar rebellion was the Wagon Tragedy. About a hundred people were crammed into a narrow goods wagon with no air, light, the door was closed and it was taken from Tirur to Coimbatore. No one can remember this incident without a shock. The heart-rending scene of the people, without air, light or water, biting, plucking and clawing at each other for air. When the goods reached Pothanur and opened the door, everyone inside was almost motionless. When the wagon that was turned back immediately and reached Tirur and inspected it, the sights were indescribably pitiful. Few people had breath. The size of the Wagons used to transport the prisoners did not match the number of prisoners they accommodated.

Rama Iyer argues through detailed examination that when the railway van LV1711 of the ill-fated train number 77 was carrying 600 people, there was not even room for a hundred people to board and stand. Wagon No. 3 of the Southern Indian Railway was used by Sergeant Green to transport 42 prisoners from Tirur to Kannur on 3 October 1921.

But it was argued that there was no emergency at this time and that the same Diameter van was the LV1711 van. Manjeri Rama Iyar, who inspected these two vans, verified the details of the transport of the prisoners from Tirur to Kannur in the third van for three hours and 18 minutes on October 3rd. During this inspection Rama Iyar found that wagons LV1711 and 3 were identical. But due to the two sheets of wagon number 3 being loose, there was a possibility of insufficient air entering the wagon. Apart from this, Sergeant Green had not bolted the door of Wagon number three from the outside. In this way, the door was only tied in such a way that air could enter through it. When the carriage reached Kozhikode, the prisoners were given an opportunity to defecate by opening the door. In this way, Sergeant Green averted another possible massacre on October 3, 1921, Rama Iyar wrote. It should be noted that only 42 prisoners boarded this van.

Rama Iyar tried to carry out a check-up in the middle compartment of the wagon LV1711 by loading the non-prisoners. After this only 20 people were able to sit in that room without any other complaints. 40 people can be accommodated in the other two rooms as well. This means that the wagon LV1711 was a van that could carry a total of 60 people. It was in this van that hundreds of prisoners were pushed by beating and hitting with guns. It was also found that only 75 people would have been able to fit into LV1711 with great difficulty if people were to be carried unseated.

Concluding his note, Rama Iyar also indicated the punishment that would be meted out to those responsible for the wagon murder. Accordingly, the railway authorities and the prisoners were in violation of Sections 62 and 63 of the Indian Railways Act IX of 1890 of the then Act. Rama Iyar pointed out that the punishment for this crime has been mentioned in sections 93 and 94 of the same law.

There are many incidents showing how pure soul was Rama Iyar. It is true that he fought against the colonial rule but at the same time he gave more importance to a human life. In 1921, when the Ernadu rebellion started, two white men who were in Malappuram ran away for their lives and reached Tirur. Rama Iyar was there then. It was a time when the rioters were ready to find and kill the whites. Rama Iyar saved them without any danger.

MANJERI POLITICAL CONFERENCE AND RAMA IYAR

The 1920 Manjeri political conference was a turning point in the history of Malabar. Manjeri Rama Iyar was one of the important leader behind this conference. The influential leadership of Rama Iyar and other leaders made this event a huge success. Through this the Khilafat movement strengthened

in Malabar areas. This conference opens an era of mass nationalism in modern Kerala political culture. There were two Home Rule League one under Tilak and another under Besant. In Malabar there was only Besantian Home Rule League. Because it draws upon the influence of the Theosophical Society which has already active in Malabar. Rama Iyar was an ardent champion of Besantian Home Rule League in Malabar. This conference was organized by Home Rulers and Theosophists in Kerala. In the wake of Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms relevance in 1920 there happened a small dispute between moderates and extremists in British India and it was the background of Manjeri Political Conference. The Manjeri conference was part of Madras statel level politics. After Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms within the congress party emerged two groups the supporters and opposers. Manjeri Rama Iyar became moderate group and at the same time K. Madhavan Nair and K. P. Keshavamenon became extrimist group. The moderates were supporters to the new laws and regulations of Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms and the extrimists were just opposite. The Manjeri Political conference represents the maximum concessions the British were willing to make at the time. The big landlords were represented the moderate groups and they were part of the conference.

The Hindu newspaper chief editor Kasthoori Ranga Iyar was the chairman of this conference. Manjeri Rama Iyar and K. Madhava Nair also played vital role in this. They were in the forefront to coordinate the conference. In 1920 April 28 the conference started at 8.00 am. They formed committees with ten people on the basis of of taluks. And discussed about the Khilafat, tenancy, new reforms. With the special recommendation of Annie Besant, the Khilafat issue was discussed in first. Moythu Maulavi, Kattilasserri, M. P. Menon were also recommended for first discussion on Khilafat issue.

In the influence of Manjeri Rama Iyar a resolution passed in the conference to start a High school in Manjeri. Rama Iyar and K. Madhavan Nair testified that there is no educational facilities in Manjeri after fourth standard. The resolution was accepted in the conference and in 1920 Malabar District Board upgraded the Manjeri Middle school into Highschool. Today the school known as Government Boys School, Manjeri. In this school there is a scout room in the name of Rama Iyar. In the history of Manjeri the Government Boys Highschool played a vital role in the upliftment of society.

CONCLUSION

Rama Iyar was a important social reformer in Kerala. Through his activities the Manjeri region witnessed social and political change in the society. The role of Rama Iyar cannot replaceable in the society. His values should be preserved. Today's generation were unaware about the personality of

Rama Iyar. Only a small group of people have idea about Rama Iyar and his activities in society. So it is necessary to have a good understanding about the role and activities of Manjeri Rama Iyar into the main stream society. In the history of Manjeri the Govt Boys Highschool played a crucial role. The school was the by product of Rama Iyar's efforts. He worked hard for the establishment of a Highschool in Manjeri. It is really important to study the great personality to the mainstream society. The emerging generation should know his contributions to the society.

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