

MANNATHU PADMANABHAN – AN INDIAN SOCIAL REFORMER AND FREEDOM FIGHTER**¹Sasilekha.S.S, ²Dr. T.Wins Joel**

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Abstract

Mannathu Padmanabhan was a social reformer and freedom fighter from the Central Kerala. He was known more for his contribution to the upliftment of Nair Community. He actively participated in their struggle for equality. He is recognized as the founder of the organization called Nair Service Society and considered as a visionary reformer.

Key Words: Freedom fighters, vimochana samaram, temple entry, nair service society untouchability.

Introduction

Mannathu Padmanabhan was born on January 2, 1878 near Changanassery, in North Travancore. He started his career as a teacher in 1893 and then changed his profession and took up legal practice from 1905 onwards. He was honored with the title 'Bharata Kesari' from the president of India. He also received Padma Bhushan in 1966. He died on February 25, 1970.

Mannam and Nair Service Society

In 1914 Mannathu Padmanabha established the Nair Service Society with the help of a few others. His main ambition was to uplift the Nairs and to regain the lost power of this former ruling sect. From 1915 onwards, he gave up a lucrative practice and became full-time secretary of the Nair Service Society. After dedicating his life to the cause of NSS and Nair Community, Mannam began to tour the length and breadth of the state to popularize the organization amongst the members of Nair Community. During this phase of his life, he was marked for simplicity, complete devotion and determination to succeed. As a result of this he could win the hearts of the people by destroying the impregnable forts of superstition and a formidable citadel of resistance in them.

Mannam and Temple entry movement

In 1924 he took part in the Vaikom and Guruvayoor temple entry and anti-untouchable agitation. He even opened his family temple for everyone irrespective of any caste distinction. Though born into an upper caste family, Mannathu Padmanabhan was concerned about the lives of the people from the oppressed castes. Hence, he was at the forefront of the agitations against the oppression of these castes. As a result of the Vaikom Sathyagraha, the Maharaja of the

princely State of Travancore had to sign the famous Temple Entry proclamation to allow to worship in the temples of the state.

Mannam and Vimochana Samaram

After the independence the first communist government took over the mantle of running the state. During the tenure of this Government, the education reform bill was introduced in the state assembly by then education minister Joseph Mundassery. It was vehemently opposed by the members of Christian and Nair Communities. In connection with this social movement, Mannathu Padmanabhan led a Vimochana Samaran to save the existing educational set up in the state. Due to this movement, the first communist government lead by E.M.S Namboodiripadu was dismissed and the president's rule was imposed on the state. With the falling of the communist government, the move to introduce the education reform bill also fell flat.

Mannam in the History of Kerala

Mannam became a member of the India National Congress in 1947 and took part in the Travancore state congress agitation against Sir C.P Ramaswamy Iyer's administration in Travancore. He became a member of the Travancore Legislative Assembly in 1949. During all these years the Nair Service Society had his constant attention and selfless service. It had now grown into a powerful organization with a vast membership, substantial finances and various welfare activities. Mannam wrote many articles, an autobiography and a travel book. He also set up colleges, schools, hospitals and industrial units. In appreciation of his valuable services the President of India awarded him the title Bharata Kesari.

Conclusion

Mannathu Padmanabhan is considered as a visionary reformer who organized the Nair Community under N.S.S. He fought for social equality and he actively took part of the temple entry movements. He also participated in the agitation against Sir C.P Ramaswamy Iyer's administration in Travancore. As the first president of Travancore Devaswom Board, he revitalized many temples which had almost ceased to function. He is regarded as the reformer and moral guide of Nairs. Padmanabhan's contributions to the progress and revitalization of the Nair Community are unparalleled. He stands among the titans of Kerala's social reform movement, but his legacy has not taken the same root as his erstwhile peers.

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