



Kudmul Ranga Rao A Revolutionary Social Reformer of Dakshina Kannada

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Abstract:

Kudmul Ranga Rao is a social reformer from Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka state, India. He was a pioneer of depressed classes' movements in Southern India for providing education, employment, housing, land and empowerments of the depressed classes. This article focuses the role of Kudmal Ranga Rao towards emancipation of depressed classes in Dakshina Kannada region also known as South Canara. This paper also highlights his constructive programs to improve the social conditions of the downtrodden. The below statement is the testament of Kudmul Ranga Raos conviction towards the upliftment of untouchables.

“A Dalit boy who studies in my school should join public service and his car should move around on our village roads. When the dust that then rises touches my head, I shall consider my life worthwhile.”

Keywords: Social Reform, Depressed Class, Untouchables, Varnashrama

Introduction:

Ranga rao was born on 29 June 1859 in a small village 'kudmul' in the Kasargod district, which is a part of former Dakshina Kannada district and 40 km from Mangalore. Rao's father Sri Devappayya worked as clerk under a Muslim land lord. Mother, Smt. Gaury. Ranga Rao was the first son among the seven children of Devappaya and Gaury. At the age of sixteen, he lost his father. Ranga's wife Rukmini Amma was a gentle and innocent lady she never interfered in her husband's social, religious and humanitarian purposes. She encouraged and supported her husband. He completed his primary education at Kasaragod and moved towards Mangalore in search of job. At Mangalore he was able to get a teaching job for eight rupees as monthly salary. As a teacher, he was very humble and affectionate person he had the revolutionary idea to reduce the difficulties of poor and depressed caste section of the society since ages the untouchables and tribal people. Ranga Rao completed his correspondence course successfully passing his pleadership examination. He became a lawyer at Mangalore.

As found in rest of India but which is not mentioned in any Varnashrama system, this custom of Untouchability was found in Dakshina Kannada district also. These untouchables belonged to different clans called MUNDALA, MUGERA, BAKUDA, BATHADA, MANNA, THOLI, KORAGA, BARIA, SAMAGARA, KUSU and others. These people were taught and enlightened about their rights to own lands and rights to do their hereditary profession with respect. They were remaining as slaves in someone else's farms, treated like animals living in forest huts in slushy areas under intolerable conditions by eating the leftovers.

Kudmul Ranga Rao could not tolerate and control. Looking at their pathetic condition, he started working towards their development, which became the only motive of his life. He sacrificed all his personal pleasures and comforts by dedicating his entire life for this idealistic cause. Improvement of Dalits, scheduled castes and tribes were his main purpose of life which he achieved by creating awareness, and proved to the society through his constructive selfless deeds. Even though he was threaten to death and insulted many times, he never gave up his determination and moral values. His conviction was intact till his last breath.

Development of Education:

For overall development and upliftment of Untouchables, Ranga Rao understood that the only education and vocational training could fulfill their basic requirement for their self sufficient earning and living an independent life. It was essential to provide these educations and vocational training in Carpentry, mortar work, black smith work, weaving and sewing and so on. In this regard, he started a School in **1892** by renting a thatched house at **Urva Chilimbi** area in Mangalore. However the people living in that area together opposed and resisted the establishment of school for Untouchables and Dalits, because of which Ranga Rao had to give up the establishment of that School there. Then he moved on to other main areas in Mangalore like **Kankanady** and **Boluru** and started two Schools separately in these areas simultaneously. Another problem he faced was that no upper caste teachers were ready to teach in these schools, so he had to appoint only Christian teachers for these schools.

Later, Ranga Rao established a primary school on his own, in his land and constructed the school building from his own money. During those days, one has to cross at least 5 to 6 rivers in boat to travel from Mangalore to Udupi, Kundapura and nearby places, as there were no bridges constructed across any rivers. Even then, Ranga Rao travelled to distant places like Malpe, Brahmavara, Tonse, Chittadi, Udhavara, Kundapura and established number of Primary schools for untouchables. He also made the passed out students

of his school as teachers to other such schools. Along with this, he was also successful in getting government grants from the then British Government for such schools.

Establishment of D.C.M. in 1897:

To conduct the Dalit developmental programmes along with schools for educating them, ‘**THE DEPRESSED CLASSES MISSION**’ was established by Ranga Rao with his close friends and well-wishers. He became President and his close associate and friend Sri. Ullala Raghunathaia was the Secretary of the institution. All the Schools were brought under this institution and started a number of schools throughout Dakshina Kannda, such as Court Hill Primary School 1st to 8th std, Attavara Elementary School – 1st std to 5th std, Derebail Elementary School – 1ststd and 2nd std, Puttur Elementary School – 1st std to 5th std, Daddal Kadu, Ullala, Mulki, Udupi, Bannanje and Nejaru, Kodialbail, from 1st std to 8th std. Boys who came to study in these Schools from distant places were provided with accommodation facilities. A hostel at Jogi Mutt place in Kadri with dormitory accommodation to boys was started. Likewise, there were altogether 20 schools with 16 teachers conferred the basic education. There were around 176 boys and 80 girls studied in these Schools.

In the first half of the day during morning session, **basic educational classes** were conducted while the second half or afternoon session was devoted to **Vocational and Industrial training**. These training include carpentry, weaving, sewing, embroidery, mortar work, clay artefacts like doll making, binding of books and other cardboard structures and also horticultural skills. The main purpose of this type of education was to bring the downtrodden people into the mainstream of the society by making them to earn their living independently and with respect.

- **Scholarships;** To attract students to School regularly he also offered scholarships of 2 to 4 paisas.
- **Diploma school** for Untouchables at **Shedigudde** in Mangalore
- In Pandeshwar, he started a School of **Adult education** exclusively for deprived and poor people.
- **Mid- Day Hot Meals** in all these Schools started voluntarily.
- Students were also provided with **medical services** free of cost by Dr. Adapa and Dr. K.B.Shetty who were famous Doctors of those times.

Female Education:

During that time, besides untouchability, there were other social plagues against Women like childhood marriage, sati system, denial of education, devadasi system and other destructive traditions and customs were prevalent in the society. Especially, women were suppressed more and even among them, widows were in a very pathetic stage. So, he concentrated more on widow education and widow remarriage. Ranga Rao also worked hard against women exploitation and for their upliftment.

To encourage female education, he started a **separate School for girl children** belonging to untouchable communities and scheduled castes in already existing **Kodialbail School** and also provided accommodation **hostel** for those girl students. Apart from this, he also started an orphanage along with the School exclusive for women including widows irrespective of caste and creed. It was called '**Swami Eshwraanda MahilaSevashrama**', located at present in Kudmul Ranga Rao Road opposite to Bunts Hostel, and later moved this Ashram to newly constructed building in **Kankanady**. He encouraged widow remarriages and also inter - caste marriages and strictly opposed child marriages. In 1912, he set an example for inter – caste marriage by getting his 2nd daughter Radha Bai married to Mr, Subburayan, who was a minister in Madras Presidency.

On behalf of the Depressed Classes Mission, under 'the scheme called '**Gomathiamma Maternity Benefit Fund**'' the scheduled class women, especially the Koraga community women were given rice and 2 sarees during maternity period.

Land Grants and houses:

During his advocate profession and winning a case in favour of a Christian lady, he received 13.5 acres of land in Derebail as his fees. This land was donated completely for charity by sharing it among 25 downtrodden families, half an acre to each family. This was done like modern layouts of present day. Collective Bhajans were performed every week in this colony along with camp fire, magic shows and elocution competitions, which made these people more informative and knowledgeable. Similarly, he bought lands in Kapikad area of Mangalore and distributed it among 30 scheduled caste untouchable families. In that settlement also he built a Star Hall with Pooja room and a large hall to perform bhajans and meetings. Thus Ranga Rao developed the D.C.M. institution using his own resources at 8 places in and around Mangalore. Through his hard work dedication and generosity, more than hundred such downtrodden scheduled caste and tribal families received a stable and convenient home to stay permanently.

- He established **Dr. Karnad's Orphanage** and accommodation for these scheduled people.
- For the children belonging to the most backward community called Koragas, a separate living quarters with dormitory accommodation was started in Puttur and Udupi taluk.

As a lawyer Ranga Rao dedicated himself to the upliftment of the poor and suppressed in society. Due to his noble work, he received the name "Lawyer of the Poor" and "friend of Poor". Lower caste people worshiped him because of his concerns for lower caste people. He always worried about the problems faced by lower caste people, and the exploitation by the upper castes of society. He desired to change the social system. His main motto was to bring reformatory changes in the belief system, ritual and life styles of the downtrodden people of the region. Reformatory activities towards the downtrodden to spread education among the untouchables, to provide employment for this segment try to remove social restrictions imposed on this case to impart religious teaching.

"SERVICE TO DALITS IS SERVICE TO GOD" was the motto of Kudmul Ranga Rao. Almost for 50 years till 1947, approximately 6,000 downtrodden people were educated and many were even raised to higher posts and designations mainly because of him. To commemorate all this Raayaru was rightly called as **"REVOLUTIONARY REFORMER OF DAKSHINA KANNADA"** During those days, DCM organisation was well known ideal institution in South India for uplifting the untouchables and downtrodden people in the society by providing education and merging them into the mainstream of the society. It is to be mentioned that Kudmul Ranga Rao made the development of untouchables and as the sole mission of his life, which was indeed very much prior to Mahatma Gandhi.

Conclusion: Social movement led by Ranga Rao during early 19th century was remarkable and created positive effect in bringing a drastic social change. This was possible because he had a vision; so far none of the social reformers has envisioned as Kudmal Ranga Rao and eventually became a reality, *"A Dalit boy who studies in my school should join public service and his car should move around on our village roads. When the dust that then rises touches my head, I shall consider my life worthwhile."*

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