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## ROLE OF SWAMI SAHAJANANDA TO THE ELEVATION OF DEPRESSED CLASS PEOPLE IN SOUTH ARCOT DISTRICT



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**Abstract:** Swami Sahajananda occupied the most coveted place in the galaxy of leaders. With a missionary zeal he championed the cause of the Harijan community and settled down at Chidambaram, where the great saint Nandanar attained beatification after a holy bath at Omakkulam tank. Shahajananda who belongs to a Harijan family, devoted his life for the elevation of depressed class people in Tamil Nadu.

**Key words:** championed, Harijan community, Elevation, Depressed Class.

### INTRODUCTION :

He was born at Melpudupakkam near Arani in the north Arcot District on 27th January, 1890 in Harijan community.<sup>1</sup> His father Mr. Annamalai and his mother Alamelu belonged to a humbles family. He was named as Munusamy by his parents.

Rights from his boy hood days, Swami Sahajananda had an unflinching faith in Hinduism and concentrated on religious study. He was sent to Arcot Mission School, at Melpudupakkam, where he successfully completed his primary education. Then he was sent to the Arcot Mission School at Tindivanam. He was so brilliant that his teachers were very proud of him and used to call him Sihamani. It was during this period that Sihamani was persuaded by the teachers to get converted to Christianity. But, as Hinduism was imbibed and deeply rooted in Sahajananda even from his earlier days, he found it difficult to embrace Christianity. So he discontinued his studies and went to Kolar Mi began to live with his parents who were at that time employed in the Kolar Gold Fields.

At Kolar Sahajananda became an ardent student of one Mudaliyar who conducted religious discourses on Hinduism end on the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabaratha.<sup>2</sup> The learning of Hindu Philosophy brought about a tremendous change in Sahajanada. He resolved to renounce the world. His faith in Ramakrishna made him embrace Vaishnavism, another sect of Hindusim, and he was very proficient both in Vaishnava and Saive principles.

After his return from Kolar to his native place in 1905, Manusamy's family circumstances forced him to work as a 'form worker' under a landlord named Subbu Neidu. During his leisure time, he used to spread religious ideas among his co-workers. His love for religion made him a zealour follower of Neelamega Swamigal of Murugapattu.

When he was 16 years old, he became a Sadhu and began to lead a life of austerity leaving his parents. He had an unquenchable thirst and wandered from place to place in

search of truth, In the course of his wanderings he came to Kanchipuram where he became the disciple of Thakkana swami, a vaishnavits saint and received from him 'sanyasam' in 1907 at the age of seventeen.<sup>3</sup> According to the instruction of his master he went to Vyasarpadi, near Madras and become the disciple of Karapathira Sivaprakasa Swamigal. It was here, that he acquired a sound knowledge of Hindu religion and philosophy. Impressed by the intellectual attainment of Munusamy, this swamigal canonized him as 'Sahajananda' which means one who is always associated and acquainted with pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

This is the story of the transformation of Munusamy into Sahajananda, a poor harijan who turned a Vaishnavite hermit. Later he came to be known as Swami Sahajananda on account of his service, religious and social.

### SWAMI SAHAJANANDA AS AN EDUCATIONALIST

The life history of Swami Sahajananda stands as a monumental record in the annals of the down-trodden in this part of the land. Swamiji's movement was based on rendering educational facilities for the harijans, because, he thought that amelioration of the Harijans can be achieved only through education. It was swamiji who championed, for the first time, the cause of this poor, illiterate labour class and his main motto of life was that Harijans should be properly educated so that they could keep pace with other sections of the society in the advancement of civilization. He had a strong conviction that education was the only tool with which he could emancipate and bring them up to a higher level.<sup>5</sup>

The Swamiji came to Chidambaram all alone. He had no property or relatives there. He set up a small mutt near Omakkulam Tank the sacred place where the great saint Nandanar, one of the sixty three Nayanmars was purified in the sacred fire. Swamiji founded Nandanar Kalvikazhagan and started a small school with a meagre strength of twenty five pupils and one teacher in the year 1910. The school was

recognised by the Government only after 1916 an Nandanar Elementary School.<sup>6</sup>

By his stewardship, undaunted will and indefatigable spirit, the small school grew from strength to strength and now it stands as the monumental testimony to his untiring efforts and insatiable zeal for the uplift of the Harijana through education. Now Nandanar Institutions are a nursery of learning and a radiating centre of social progress for all sections of people.<sup>7</sup>

In the year 1937 the Higher Elementary school was up-graded into a High School. The important development of the school took place from 1943. In that year, the Government granted 30 acres of waste land lying to the South of the Nandanar Mutt. In 1947 the year of Independence, the institution founded by the Swamiji was bifurcated into two High Schools, one for boys and other for girls. Later in 1978 the two institutions were upgraded into Higher Secondary Schools.<sup>8</sup>

#### **SWAMI SAHAJANANDA AS A RELIGIOUS LEADER**

The Swamiji rose from the dust to the Everest of name, mainly through religion. In India any social worker cannot come out successfully unless he mixes his service with religious work. In fact, any public service is a religious one.

The Swamiji's Hinduism was an Inborn one. His early life is a proof of it. He became a disciple of Karapathira Swamigal who taught him all Hindu Vedic Scriptures. He was so brilliant in learning Vedas and Upanishads that Karapathira Swamigal initiated him into the religious order. With the mark of a Saivaite Sage, the Swamiji departed from the Karapathira Swamigal to Chidambaram and was just leading the life of a Sannyasi teaching Saivaite principles.<sup>9</sup>

With a generous assistance of Swami Paranjodhi of Geetha Madalay of Pannanpattu, Swami Sahajananda erected a holy shrine of Lord Siva on the Southern bank of Omakkulam Tank.

Besides building a Siva temple of his own, he wanted to take a procession in memory of Saint Nandanar along the car street of Chidambaram. The Dhikshatars of Thillai Nataraja Temple permitted him to do so. And so, on the last day of Lord Nataraja festival (that would last for ten days biannually), the Swamiji was leading the procession along the four streets of Lord Nataraja Temple. But towards his forties, he started reading Ramayana in Sanskrit.<sup>10</sup>

He began to study Kamba Ramayana, and the works of Maraneri Nambigal, Nambudhuvar, and Thirupanezhwar. He began to conduct discourses on those works. The Vaishnavite faith became so strong in him that he appointed a Sanskrit Scholar to teach Ramayana to the students of his schools every evening. These show that he had been led into Vaishnavism by his faith and reading of such works. For Swamiji Vaishnavism and Saivism are the two sides of the same coin of Hindu religion he considered both of them as the two eyes. There was no difference between the two sects as far as he was concerned. This is the Stand that he took of Hinduism.

He said in his speech under the auspices of the Hindu religious and charitable Endowments that there have been many religious and pious men who were in charge of the

monasteries bearing exemplary conduct and character, among the pseudo religious men who appeared Sanctimonious.<sup>11</sup>

#### **The Reformation Bill of 1954**

The Swamiji was a great Sanskrit scholar. He had knowledge of the Sanskrit Vedic scriptures. His knowledge of religion was full, his understanding of scriptures was to the brim. Therefore, when none dared to resist Perlyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker's activities like burning Ramayana, and beating the idol of Rama with chapel, the Swamiji alone decried against that. The action of the Swamiji in this respect was appreciated by the Government as well as the pious people.<sup>12</sup>

Further Swamiji castigated actors like Mr. M.R. Ratha who dramatised Ramayana and ridiculed and condemned most of the ideas and actions which demoralised the society. The then education Minister Sri. Subramaniam took proper action, in this regard. The Hindus were thus saved from being hurt and humiliated by the timely action of the Government.

Similarly the Swamiji expressed his deep feelings of sorrow at the incidents of breaking of the "Vinayaka" idols by Sri Ramasamy Periyar. He condemned the thought of those who began to misinterpret Ramayana and bring shame on Hindu epics, Upanishads and Vedic scriptures. Gandhiji's singing of 'Ragupathi Ragava Rajaram' was laughed at by such atheists.<sup>13</sup>

The Swamiji requested that people must restrain from such activities and thoughts which hurt the feelings of the people. He appealed to the Government to take steps to see that nobody behaved in such a way as to wound the feelings of the public. Though there was liberty to speak, it should not be allowed to hurt the feelings of the Hindus.<sup>14</sup>

The Swamiji pointed out that in no other religion such a thing occurred in all the world. If anybody talked ill of Rama once he declared, "he would not mind killing him." There was heated argument in the Assembly. Eventhough the Swamiji was highly attacked by one sect of the Hindus, the majority supported him.

#### **Swami Sahajananda's Social Service**

In the year 1931 Swami Sahajananda made a speech on the Assembly floor on mofussil problems. He fought for the reduction of the tax for the fallow lands and the lands affected due to drought and flood and appealed to the Government to look into the matter of irrigation. He suggested constructing dams across the rivers wherever necessary. He also suggested the reclamation of lands for cultivation. He expressed his deep concern over the burning of the huts of Harijans. He entreated the Government to look into the matter of providing house-sites for the Adi-Dravidas and improve their lot by giving loans from banks. He was a staunch follower of Gandhian principle and so he pleaded that prohibition should be enforced.<sup>15</sup>

The next question dealt with by Swamiji Sahajananda was eradication of illiteracy. Free education upto high school level was suggested by Gandhiji. The Swamiji said education must be made easy for children of the poor parents. For the westerners, education is a costly

affairs. But the poor country like India could not afford to spend as much of education. A substantial amount of money should be allotted for education.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Swami Sahajananda as a Legislator**

Swamiji endeavoured hard to ameliorate the sufferings of the downtrodden. He never missed the opportunity to bring to the Madras Council, the deplorable condition of the depressed. The Kallars of Ezhuvankottai village of Devakottai Taluk rode rough shede and humiliated the Adi-Dravidas. They never allowed Adi-Dravidas to prosper. The depressed classes were not allowed to wear gold or silver ornaments or to cover their breasts. The males were not allowed to unfold the dhoti below the knee or to wear shirt or to use umbrellas and chappals.

The Swamiji saw that the Harijans were not given worthy position though they deserved that. They were held under the thumb of the high class people. They were posted as peons and menials. The Government of Madras considered the question and allotted 12½% of appointments at later period to the scheduled castes and thereby absorbed the qualified candidates among them in different departments of state Service.<sup>17</sup> He beseeched the Government to note that only the mean jobs were given to the depressed classes, on the representation made by the inmates of the jail. After that, the inmates of the jail, were assigned duty according to their qualification. In the year 1947 the Demand Bill of Administration and Miscellaneous, he implored the Government to recruit the depressed people directly an Deputy Collectors. He also wanted the Government to form a separate commission for it.

He appealed to the Government to appoint the candidates of the depressed classes as Magistrates in the Judicial Department. He also suggested the quota system of supply to each village and the appointment of a supervising body so as to prevent the mirasdars from using their influence to take away the goods for their use. He also entreated the Government to allot a substantial amount of fund for the uplift of the downtrodden.<sup>18</sup>

He fought unweariedly to raise the economic status of the down trodden people. Most of the depressed class people led only hand to mouth life. The daily wages of a cooly in an agricultural farm was very meagre. This, he could not tolerate and he repeated his demand for a higher wage and convinced the Land Lords about the needs to raise it. He claimed a considerable share of the harvest for the tiller who cultivated lands of his master on hire basis.

When he became a full time politician, he worked hard for the welfare of the Harijans. Till his end he toiled for promoting the welfare of the Harijans. Because of his deep gusto and perseverance, his name is marked in the pages of history. He advised the landed bourgeois to come forward to till the land and wanted those who had more than the requirement to surrender the excess land to the Government as a compulsory measure. He supported the Bhoodan Movement Which had been inaugurated by Vinobabhave and the Tanjore kissan protection Act, which enunciated the principle that the land should belong to the tillers only. The Government assigned the surplus lands to the landless agricultural labourer belonging to low castes. But the

Swamiji demanded the Government that all the paramboke lands should be assigned to the members of the Depressed classes.<sup>19</sup>

The Government implemented the Tamil Nadu Land Acquisition Act for Harijan Welfare Schemes in 1978 and assigned cultivable land to poor landless Harijans along with other caste-Hindus. In the order of priority shown for assignment, the scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribes are placed in the second place. He was highly dissatisfied with the Government of Madras for assigning the lands to the military pensioners and Freedom fighters which were already allotted to the Harijans by the British Government. He also brought to the notice of the Government the plight of poor Harijans who had no connection with the army or with the Freedom Movement.

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