

RAMALINGA VALLALAR: THE GREATEST ICON OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORMS

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Protest movements are basically social injustices; caste oppression, social inequalities, unrest and dissatisfaction from the current form of life are causes for the birth of social and liberated movements. Oormen rightly pointed out that “social movements are purposive and collective mobilizations, informed of an ideology to promote change in any direction using any means violent or non violent and functioning within at least an elementary organizational frame work”. Such a social movement was organized by swami Ramalingam alias Arut Prakasa Vallalar in the 19th century A.D to alleviate social and religious backwardness existed in the society.

Ramalinga’s Career

India gave birth two great saints in the 19th century Ramakrishna Paramahansa in the north and Vallalar in the south. Ramalinga Vallalar was born on 5th October 1823 in Marudur near Chidambaram in a hindu saivite family as the fifth child to Ramiah Pillai and Chinnammal. It is said that Chinnammaiyar borne Vallalar in her womb after she received ‘vibuthi’ⁱ from a sivayogi who blessed her son like himself.ⁱⁱ Vallalar, the great benevolent and munificent lived a short span of an eventful life for fifty one year’s only, but he has left behind him a vast yoga literature in tamil called Arutpa besides a considerable volume of prose works, letters, public notices, records of speeches and teachings of upadesha. At the age of eleven, he sang devotional hymns in praise of Siva and goddess Uma in front of the Siva shrine at Tiruvottiyur near Chennai. Even in these early songs we meet with his intense and fiery aspiration for the grace – world of truth – knowledge (Arul Veli). These songs also touch his aspiration for spiritual life, purification, consecration, devotion, surrender, compassion and reverence for all beings and creature and oneness with the divineⁱⁱⁱ. These songs are called Tiruarutpa.

Ramalingam wrote his masterpiece of Jothi Agaval in 1872. It describes the self determination of the vast grace –light, the poise of the world of truth – knowledge, planes of ascent, involution and evolution, golden plane of the earth. Purifying and transforming powers of the light, transformation of his body, knowledge and science of deathlessness of body, general nature and characteristics of the world of truth- knowledge. Vallalar unfurled the flag^{iv} of his Sanmarga Sanga on 22nd October 1873. He marked that day as its effective beginning and also gave the ‘Mahamantra’ of vast grace – light by divine sanction to the discipline on the same day. About this period he also expressed his will to enter into all physical bodies (i.e on an universal level). Vallalar withdrew in seclusion in a closed room in Mettukuppam on 30th January 1874.^v Promising the disciples that the god of light was imminently coming and he would disappear from their sight for a period and would come

back when the divine light became manifested. From his last songs, message and spoken words, it is seen that his dematerialization of his deathless body occurred in the divine presence and in the process of the stable manifestation of the god of Vast Grace – Light on this earth. Thus the dematerialization of his body was a sacrifice and consecration.^{vi} The Ramalinga was never seen thereafter, the place of his disappearance was soon inspected by the then district collector and medical officer. They have reported confirming his disappearance. One can very well feel today the spiritual supramental forces of deathlessness in the place of his last resort in ‘Siddhi Valaga Maligai’ at Mettukuppam and also shrine of Satya Gnana Sabha at Vadalur stands as a symbol and monument in honour of the coming of the supreme divine to the earth.

Ramalinga’s Philosophy

Vallalar never started a new religion or propagated new ideology. He gave a new definition to the prevailing ideologies. He declared that the four Vedas are common to all the Hindus. Like Sankara and Ramanuja, Ramalingam also gave a new interpretation to the four Vedas as Suddham, Samarasam and Sanmargam. He interpreted the word Sangha as Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam.^{vii} He gave meaning to veda as a ‘Book of knowledge’. Even though we are practicing different religions, all religions have a common three principles of philosophy, disciplined way of life and rituals. Philosophy and rituals differ from religion to religion but disciplined way of life never differs. So Vallalar throughout his life insisted the disciplined life. There are normally four important ways and means to attain the holy feet of God. There are Dasa Marga, Satputra Marga and Sanmarga^{viii}. In Dasa Marga the relationship between god and devotee is like that of a master and servant, in Satputra Marga that of a father and a son, in Saga Marga that of equal and a equal and in San Marga that of a friend to a friend. Among these four Margas, Vallalar insisted the Sanmarga, which means a permanent disciplined life.

Vallalar A Religious Reformer

For disciplined life Sanmarga and Jeeva Karunya Olukkam^{ix} is the nucleus. Vallalar insisted Jeeva Karunya Olukkam.^x Worship of god, simplicity, pity, compassion and self control are the important teachings of the Vallalar to live disciplined way of life. He preaches that one should be always helpful to others. One should not afraid of God. With regard to worship he sang

The above hymns portrait that rituals and philosophy are not essential for worship of god but discipline is the essence of Siddha Sanmarga. Ramalinga Vallalar vehemently opposed rituals, philosophy and caste system through his hymns he clearly indicates that Ramalinga was not only a social reformer but also a religious reformer. The great ‘Mantra’ of Sanmarga is

‘Arutperm jothi Arutperm jothi
Thanip perung Karunai Arutperm jothi’
(Vast Grace – light Vast Grace – light
Supreme Compassion vast Grace Light)^{xi}

Vallalar: A Social Reformer

Vallalar insisted four important things for the harmonious life of the society. They are knowledge, love, discipline and truth. Vallalar preached his followers who wanted to serve for the goodness of the society that they should renounce three worst practices of great attachment towards caste, rituals and religion.

The hymns proved Vallalar was the one who affirmed openly and clearly in an unmistakable language the deathlessness of his body. He attained this by the power of what he called 'Arutperum Jothi' of the divine which he identified as the Truth – Light of Knowledge i.e 'Sathya Gana Jothi.'

In the last decade of his life Ramalinga Vallalar started association of spiritual fellowship namely Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sangam in 1865 at Karunkuzhi.^{xii} It was an association for the path of purity truth and harmony. In 1867 he opened a Dharmasala at Vadalur for the feeding of the poor and hungry. He founded a symbolic shrine of worship called Sathya Gana sabha in 1872 at Vadalur.^{xiii} In this shrine the light of lamp is worshipped as the divinely sanctioned and blessed symbol of the divine light of Truth – Knowledge of Truth consciousness. Vallalar even wrote to suggest that this lamp of light representing the seven veils of ignorance, might be lit up in the shrine until the god of vast grace light become manifest on the earth with his siddhis or miracles such as the changing of the aged into youth and re-awakening of the dead into bodily life. These miracles are the indications of his manifestation.

Thus throughout his life Vallar preached many things for the harmonious life of the people. He cried Pachittiru, Tanittiru, Vilithiru for every individual to attain self respect and self consciousness. In short he rightly thought that caste, creed, colour, customs, dogma, superstition, ritual or dialectics should not divide man from man.

References

ⁱ **Vibuthi** means the sacred ash used by the ardent hindus on their forehead as holy mark.

ⁱⁱ **Tiruarutpa**, Sixth Canto, Arul Vilakka Malai, V- 4133

ⁱⁱⁱ Paramarthalingam. C. **Social Reform Movement in Tamilnadu**, Rajakumari Publications, Madurai,

1995, p.44

^{iv} The flag contain yellow and white.

^v Uran Adikal (Ed) **Tiruarutpa**, Vadalur Sanmargha research Center, 1972, p.27

^{vi} Edwin Raja. R, Gunasekar. D, **History of Modern Tamilnadu**, Channdar Publication, Madurai, 1978,

p.137

^{vii} Paramathalinga. C, **Op cit.**, p 39

^{viii} **Tiruarutpa**, sixth Canto, V - 3768

^{ix} **Jeeva Karunya** Means showing Love and Compassion to all living creatures in the world.

^x Sirpi Balasubramaniam (Ed), **Ramalinga Vallalar's Arutpa Amutham**, Sahitya Akademy, 2001, New

Delhi, p.315

^{xi} Sirpi Balasubramaniam, **Op cit.**, p.25

^{xii} Paramarthalingam. C., **Op cit.**, p. 36

^{xiii} Uran Adikal, **Op cit.**, p. 29