

## **SOCIAL REFORMS INITIATED BY SREE CHATTAMPI SWAMIKAL IN KERALA**

**V.T. JAYASREE**

**Research Scholar**

**Register No:19131191082007,**

**Department of History,**

**Sadakathullah Appa College,**

**Affiliated in Manonmaniam Sundaranar University**

**Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India**

**Dr.A.H. Mohideen Badshah**

**Associate Professor**

**Department of History,**

**Sadakathullah Appa College,**

**Affiliated in Manonmaniam Sundaranar University**

**Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India**

### **Abstract**

Sree Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924) was a revered sage and social reformer in Kerala during the late 19th century. Alongside his contemporary, Narayana Guru, he aimed to transform the heavily ritualistic and caste-bound Hindu society of that era. Swamikal questioned rigid interpretations of Hindu texts, emphasizing compassion and inclusivity. His mission was to liberate Hinduism from excessive ritualism and caste-based restrictions. Swamikal actively worked for women's emancipation, encouraging their participation in public life. He believed in breaking free from societal constraints. Swamikal promoted vegetarianism as a way to foster compassion and respect for all living beings. His commitment to non-violence extended beyond dietary choices. Swamikal believed that different religions were diverse paths leading to the same ultimate truth. He facilitated dialogue and understanding among followers of various faiths. Chattampi Swamikal maintained friendships across Kerala, enriching his life intellectually and spiritually. He authored several books on spirituality, history, and language. Chattampi Swamikal's legacy continues to inspire generations, urging them to question norms, champion equality, and seek spiritual enlightenment.

**Keywords: Chattampi Swamikal, Social reformer, against Christianity, Women society and non-violence.**

## Introduction

Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924) wasn't a follower of orthodox interpretations of Hindu texts. Instead, he challenged them using the Vedas themselves. A champion of social reform alongside Narayana Guru, Swamikal fought against Kerala's rigid caste system and excessive rituals in the late 19th century. He advocated for women's empowerment, urging them to take a more active role in society. A vegetarian and believer in non-violence (Ahimsa), Swamikal saw different religions as diverse paths to the same truth. While opposing Christian missionary conversions, he held no grudge against Christianity itself. Throughout his life rich in intellect and spirituality, Swamikal cultivated friendships across Kerala, authoring books on spirituality, history, and language during his stays with these friends.

## Social Reformer of Kerala

Chattampi Swamikal stands as a unique figure in Kerala's social reform movement. Unlike others, he didn't rely on organizations to spread his message. Active during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time of widespread exploitation, Swamikal championed religious and social reform. The rigid caste system was a major source of injustice, and Swamikal dedicated himself to dismantling it and guiding Kerala towards a more equitable society. His efforts sparked a wave of change. Sanskrit and Vedic knowledge, previously restricted by caste, became accessible to all. Temples, once exclusive, opened their doors. The lives of lower castes improved dramatically, with opportunities for education, religious participation, and leadership. Swamikal emphasized that one's actions, not birth, determine one's worth. He envisioned a reformed Hinduism. For him, religion should liberate the soul, foster spiritual growth, and guide moral development. He rejected its use for control or oppression, believing it should solely uplift lives. Consequently, he vehemently opposed the caste system, declaring caste irrelevant. Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924) wasn't a follower of orthodox interpretations of Hindu texts. Instead, he challenged them using the Vedas themselves. A champion of social reform alongside Narayana Guru, Swamikal fought against Kerala's rigid caste system and excessive rituals in the late 19th century. He advocated for women's empowerment, urging them to take a more active role in society. A vegetarian and believer in non-violence (Ahimsa), Swamikal saw different religions as diverse paths to the same truth. While opposing Christian missionary conversions, he held no grudge against Christianity itself. Throughout his life rich in intellect and spirituality, Swamikal cultivated friendships across Kerala, authoring books on spirituality, history, and language during his stays with these friends.

Chattampi Swamikal stands as a unique figure in Kerala's social reform movement. Unlike others, he didn't rely on organizations to spread his message. Active during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time of widespread exploitation, Swamikal championed religious and social reform. The rigid caste system was a major source of injustice, and Swamikal dedicated himself to dismantling it and guiding Kerala towards a more equitable society. His efforts

sparked a wave of change. Sanskrit and Vedic knowledge, previously restricted by caste, became accessible to all. Temples, once exclusive, opened their doors. The lives of lower castes improved dramatically, with opportunities for education, religious participation, and leadership. Swamikal emphasized that one's actions, not birth, determine one's worth. He envisioned a reformed Hinduism. For him, religion should liberate the soul, foster spiritual growth, and guide moral development. He rejected its use for control or oppression, believing it should solely uplift lives. Consequently, he vehemently opposed the caste system, declaring caste irrelevant. Kerala society was once rigidly segregated by caste. Interdining was unthinkable: a Brahmin wouldn't share a meal with an Ezhava, and social hierarchies were strictly enforced. Chattampi Swamikal defied these norms. He not only entered homes across caste lines, but also shared meals with people, using these opportunities to discuss his ideas on social reform and religion. He championed equality for all, advocating for equal access to political rights, education, and economic opportunities.

Swamikal's approach to reform was unconventional. Unlike his contemporaries, he didn't rely on mass movements or established organizations. Instead, he lived by his convictions, residing with people from various castes and engaging in open discussions. He challenged the status quo by reinterpreting Hindu scriptures. He exposed misinterpretations that perpetuated the unjust social system, criticized superstitions and discriminatory customs, and ultimately undermined the intellectual justification for Brahmin dominance in religious, economic, and political spheres. This paved the way for reforms such as ending child marriage and polygamy. Chattampi Swamikal's teachings and views laid the groundwork for many social improvements in Kerala. Throughout his life, Swamikal authored works later published by his disciples. "Pracheena Malayalam" challenged the legitimacy of upper-caste privileges and their dominance in economic and political spheres. Swamikal used historical evidence to debunk the myth of Kerala being a gift from Parasurama. He argued that the Nayakans were the original inhabitants who fostered Kerala's prosperity, while Brahmins arrived later and imposed the unjust caste system. Swamikal's research further revealed a shared ancestral lineage for Nairs and Ezhavas, suggesting a rich cultural heritage they both possessed. Another of his works, "Vedadikara Nirupanam," advocated for the right of all castes to study the Vedas, establish temples, and pursue education

## Conclusion

Chattampi Swamikal left a lasting legacy as a beacon of knowledge and wisdom. After his samadhi in 1924, a Shiva temple and the Panmana ashrama were established in his honor, where annual gatherings commemorate his life and teachings. He led by example, living simply and advocating for a casteless society with equitable access to education and social opportunities. Swamikal's impact extended beyond Hinduism. His efforts made the Vedas and Sanskrit accessible for study and teaching across all castes, benefiting countless individuals. Education

and temples were no longer the exclusive domain of Brahmins, dismantling systems that exploited lower castes. These remarkable changes, fueled by Swamikal's teachings and the work of his followers, transformed Kerala from a land of entrenched injustice into a more equitable society.

### Reference

1. Vijayalakshmi K.V., "Contribution of ChattampiSwamikal to Advaita Philosophy", Kannur, 2011.
2. Maheswaran Nair, K, "SreeNarayana Guru, SahithyaPrvarthakaSahakaranaSangham", Kottayam, 2016.
3. Kirtyanandha, "ChattampiSwamikal", Kottayam, 1899.
4. Raman Nair. R., "Chattampi Swami, ChristumathaChetanam", Kottayam, 1884.
5. GopalaPillai.K., "ParamaBhattaraChattampiSwamikal (Malayalam)", Thrissur, 1935.
6. SukumaranNair.G., "ChattampiSwamikal", Ernakulam, 2000.