

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Role of Kudmul Ranga Rao in empowerment Of Dalits in the undivided Dakshina Kannada District**

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**Kudmul Ranga Rao (1859 to 1928) was a social reformer from former South Kanara district, who was one of the pioneers of depressed classes movements in Southern India for providing education, better housing, employment and empowering the depressed classes socially by guarding them against exploitation by upper classes in later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper briefly discusses the role of Kudmul Ranga Rao in relation to the emancipation of the depressed classes in South Kanara region. It also highlights the way he followed to improve the social conditions of the downtrodden people parallel to Mahatma Gandhi during that contemporary period.**

**Key words:** Kudmul Ranga Rao, Empowerment, Undivided, Untouchable, Empowering, Depressed

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Ranga Rao was born on 29 June, 1859 in a small village 'kudmul' in the Kasaragod district, which is a part of former South Kanara district and 40 km from Mangalore of the new Dakshina Kannada District, which is where the well-known and honorable Gauda Saraswat Brahmin family lived. Ranga Rao's father, Sri Devappayya, worked as clerk under a Muslim land lord; Devappayya was a simple and religious man who lived a middle class poor life (middle class poor life is one kind of the class structure existed in the Indian society). Ranga Rao's mother, Smt. Gaury, was deeply pious, truthful, gentle and polite. Ranga Rao was the first son among the seven children of Devappayya and Gaury. At the age of sixteen, Ranga Rao lost his father. In the middle of all the hardships, he completed his primary education at Kasargode and moved towards Mangalore in search of his fortune. At Mangalore, he was able to get a teaching job for eight rupees as monthly salary he became a cult phenomenon among his pupils as well as the surrounding

people as he had a genuine personality. As teacher, he was very humble and affectionate-a down to earth person. In his youth, Ranga had the revolutionary idea to reduce the difficulties of the suppressed population. He used to mingle with the poor and depressed caste section of the society. He was a man who wore his heart on his sleeves (Kamalaksha, 1986 p. 13). Ranga's wife, Rukmini Amma was a gentle and innocent lady who co-operated in all sphere of Ranga Rao's life. Her role in her husband's life was a notable one. She never said a word against her husband, never interfered in her husband's social, religious and humanitarian purposes. She always encouraged and supported her husband. Ranga Rao completed his matriculation examination through a correspondence course, which he then followed-up by successfully passing his pleadership (one who argues for a client in a court) examination. He worked very hard to achieve this goal to start his career as a lawyer in the Mangalore.

## CONTACT WITH THE BRAHMO SAMAJ INSTITUTION

Ranga Rao started his career in teaching profession but later became popularly known as a lawyer at Mangalore. He had a close friendship with Raghunathaiah, the founder of Brahma Samaja at the place Ullala, which is near Mangalore. Raghunathaiah was also Ranga Rao's brother-in-law; he was a gentle as well as a pious man. He, too, was against some of the existing practices of the Hindu religion like superstitious beliefs, blind fold practices, etc (Kamalaksha, 1986 pp.15-17).

During this peak time, Mangalore witnessed the spread of the German missionary activities and this had a great effect on Raghunathaiah which, in turn, affected Ranga. Raghunathaiah converted to Christianity, but soon realized that the mental stress and, suffering of his family members causes him to convert to Brahma Samaj.

Brahmo Samaj was a product of Social Reform Movements which has taken place in India during 18th century. Raghunathaiah was the first person to introduce and establish the branch of Brahma Samaj Mangalore. The friendship between Ranga Rao with Raghunathaiah is praiseworthy.

## RANGA RAO AS A LAWYER

As a lawyer, Ranga dedicated himself to truth, and righteousness and 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". For example, once an upper caste man raped a lower caste woman and she became pregnant, Ranga Rao fought in-favor of that lady against the caste Hindu system and was able to provide justice to her in this situation. With his actions, he became the victim of outraged Hindus; however, the, lower caste people worshiped him. His character attracted even the British Juries, who respected him the most<sup>1</sup>.

In 19th century, while the British were governing, South Canara was under the Madras Presidency. The British gave more attention for the development and the upliftment of the lower caste people: they opened schools, public wells, and separate colonies for their benefit. One such school was at Valencia, in Mangalore (near the north side of Welfare School, Muttikal, and Nanoligudde). This school provided free mid-day meals for the students. Bendur Babu, who belonged to the depressed caste society studied up to 4th standard at this school and later became the role model for Ranga Rao. Their lives intertwined over the years.

For example, around 1887 to 1888, when Ranga Rao was working as a lawyer in the Mangalore District Court, at British judge appointed Bendur Babu as a clerk in the

<sup>1</sup>Source: Interviewed with Mr. Ram Kumar, Taluk Extension Officer of Backward Classes and Minorities, on 7/4/2010 at the office of Taluk Panchayat, Mangalore – 1.

same district court; however, the upper caste people were against this appointment and protested. Unfortunately, this British judge got transferred and wanted to clear the upper caste's anxiety, so he called Babu as well as Ranga Rao to a meeting, and said he wanted to cancel Babu's appointment to protect Bendur Babu from the upper caste's harassment.

Further, the judge requested Ranga Rao to make arrangements for good education for the lower caste people to ensure they become self-developed and self-respected. This incident had a great impact on Ranga Rao because even though it was a milestone for his overall responsibility as a lawyer, this incident became a turning point in his concern for lower caste people<sup>2</sup>.

This incident made him isolate himself from his work as lawyer; instead he spent much of his time for the betterment of the depressed caste people. He was worried about the problems faced by lower caste people, and the exploitation by the upper castes on this segment of society. He desired to change the social system itself, where one human being treated another as an animal. His mind was always searching on how to change the existing social set-up of the society: how to eradicate the caste system, the social inequality, how to eliminate the term "untouchability", and how to purify our soul so all human beings are considered the supreme creatures of God's creation.

He decided that it was his duty and responsibility to work for the suppressed in order to bring them back into the society. He tried his best to fulfill that goal even leaving his legal practice for this purpose. At that time, Ranga was just 30 years old. His main motto was to bring reformative changes in the belief system, ritual and life styles of the downtrodden people of the region. In 1897, he, with the help of Ulla Raghunathaiah, started an office called "The Depressed Classes Mission" (DCM), Kodialbail, Mangalore and elected Raghunathaiah, as the secretary of that office. Afterwards, he started all creative and reformative activities towards the downtrodden under the Mission's banner. The objectives of the Mission were multiples: to spread education among the untouchables, to seek to provide employment for this segment of society, to try to remove social restrictions imposed on this case, and to impart religious teaching to them to allow them to become better citizens<sup>3</sup>.

## RANGA RAO AND RELIGION

Ranga Rao was a great thinker as well as very generous

<sup>2</sup> Source: Interview with Mrs. Sita Bai, Former Warden, on 4/2/2010 at the office of Ranga Rao Girl's Hostel, Kudmul Ranga Rao Road, Kodialbail, Mangalore – 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid and interview conducted with the Devadasa Kudroli, a noted religious singer of Kudroli, who received 'Kanakadasa' award recently. He is the man who strongly believed the ideas of Kudmul Ranga Rao for the benefit of the Scheduled castes communities.

by treating his enemies as friends. Even though he was threatened to death and insulted many times, he never gave up his determination and moral values to see change wrought in the caste system. An example of Ranga's ability to learn is described as follows:

Daddalkad Anand, who lived at the Daddalkad colony in Mangalore, was working as a lower level clerk in DCM Institution. The main branch of the institution was at Shedigudde. Anand's routine work was to take letters from the main branch as well as the school at Court Hill and to deliver the mail to Ranga Rao's house. Once, Ranga Rao had to go out for some urgent work and he requested that Anand deliver the letters before 10.00 a.m. next morning. But that particular day, the headmaster of Shedigudde School was late; consequently, Anand could not deliver letters on time. When he found out, Ranga Rao was very furious and took Anand to task. Ranga was not ready to listen to Anand's explanations, though Anand very politely started to mumble the actual situation, Ranga Rao went away. Later, Anand narrated the incident to the Headmaster. The headmaster felt guilty as he was responsible for the delay causing the incident. The headmaster wrote a letter to Ranga Rao and clarified the matter. When Ranga Rao came to know the truth, he regretted that the poor clerk had to undergo misery because of his unwillingness to listen. Ranga called Anand and told him that by mistake he had punished him. So as compensation, Ranga would offer Anand an Idly, is one of the South Indian dish which is used for breakfast and a cup of Coffee from his breakfast every morning. The foregoing incident shows how humble and pure in heart and nature Ranga Rao was' (Kamalaksha, 2010)<sup>4</sup>.

Ranga Rao was a man of curiosity. He wrote articles and published them in newspapers. He was fluent in many languages like Kannada, English, Konkani, and Tulu. He was a great speaker, writer and also loved reading different kinds of books; he had his own library at DCM office. Once, DCM's office faced a great financial crisis; it was difficult for Ranga Rao even to fulfill the basic necessities like food. In this critical situation, Ranga Rao suddenly remembered famous British industrialist Sriman Morgan Dore.

Immediately, Ranga Rao ordered his secretary, Mr. S. Ekambaraya, to write a letter to him, mentioning the hard times upon DCM office as Sriman Morgan Dore used to give enough donations and presents to the office. Mr. Ekambaraya wrote a letter to Mr. Dore and sent the letter with Mr. Gopalkrishna Master, who belonged to the depressed caste and resided at Kunjibettu near Udupi. Mr. Dore got angry after reading the letter and aggressively told Mr. Gopalkrishna Master to leave his place.

Gopalkrishna Master directly returned to Ranga Rao and described each and everything to him. Ranga Rao reads the letter and feels very sorry because the letter was in the form of an order instead of a request submission to send money. On the back side of the letter, Ranga Rao once again writes requesting for money and asks Gopalkrishna Master to deliver the letter to Mr. Dore. Soon after reading the letter, Mr. Dore ties a number of silver coins in a towel and gives them to Mr. Master and said to give these coins to Ranga Rao. This shows Ranga Rao's effective, heart touching writing style. Those letters had a great impact on the readers.

## RANGA RAO'S CREATIVE WORK

At the end of 19th century, Ranga Rao started his social reformation. During this time, the Untouchables were not allowed to enter any schools or colleges. They were not allowed to use public wells, hotels and rivers for water. So, the upper class people never liked the people who worked for these downtroddens even they opposed such works in India. Ranga Rao never cared for society's expectations or those of his family members. Again, the untouchables were not willing to change as they faced many threats from the upper caste people if they attempted to integrate into society. Upper caste people thought that if they supported the betterment of the Untouchables, then there would not be any serfs or slaves to work for them since feudalism prevailed during this time in India's history.

Meanwhile, the untouchables had different sections amongst themselves. These uneducated people were very superstitious and thought that if they revolted against the existing social system God might punish them. So, even these untouchables were against Ranga Rao's wishes to change the culture. But, Ranga Rao had patience, intelligence and with a broad smile when he faced all the various forms of opposition to change the status quo. His only dream was to educate the Untouchables. He wanted to bring social awareness, intellectual consciousness, and belief amongst each other, self-respect, good righteousness, dignity and intellectual refinement among the Untouchables.

In order, to fulfill his dreams, Ranga Rao planned for certain changes. With the help of the friends, he worked to bring these reforms into practice. As a first step, he planned to open residential schools for Untouchables all over the district<sup>5</sup>.

## First school

In 1892, for the first time he opened a school for the

<sup>4</sup> Source: Interview with Mr. Ram Kumar, Taluk Extension Officer of Backward Classes and Minorities, on 7/4/2010 at the office of Taluk Panchayat, Mangalore – 1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Untouchables at Urva Chilimbi, in Mangalore. He purchased a small house for rent; however, soon the school was closed by the upper caste people by disturbing the children though they were very few in numbers, but Ranga Rao's determination was not shaken. Later, he started primary schools for the first time at Kankanadi and Boluru in Mangalore. However, when Hindu teachers refused to teach the lower caste children, Ranga Rao appointed Christian teachers instead (Karnad and Desai, 1971 p. 30).

In 19th century, at Shedigudde in Mangalore, he opened a school as well as a diploma school for the Untouchables. He also built residences (Homes) for the 'Koraga' sect of people at Shedigudde and financially helped them to develop their handicraft works and cottage industries. He acquired lands for 'Koraga' people at Udupi and Puttur. He constructed a residential school for girls. For those children who learnt up to 4th standard, Ranga Rao sent them to study at the teacher's training course. Ranga Rao constructed many schools at Attavara Babugudde Daddal Kadu, Ullala, Mulki and Udupi (Bananje, Nejaru). He appointed those students who were trained as teachers to become, in turn, the teachers for these very schools.

In order to encourage the students to attend the school regularly, he used to give 2 to 4 paisa, a form of Indian Currency, to the students. Mr. Mundappa Master, Benduru Babu Master, Byaripalla Angara Mastar, Putta Master, Basava Mastar, Kapikadu Paddu Mastar, Guruva Mastar, J. Babu Mastar, Koraga Mastar, and U. Koti Mastar, Govinda Mastar (Udupi) were some of the famous teachers who studied in these "Panchama" schools. Ranga Rao tried his best to run these schools with the help of his close friends and well-wishers, but soon realized that it is difficult to run the schools in a proper way. He brought all the educational institutions and activities under DCM (Karnad and Desai, 1971: 31-32).

### **Ranga Rao's effort to eradicate slavery**

For almost thousand years, the Untouchables (lower caste people) and tribal people, in order to fulfill or earn their basic necessities like food and cloth, worked like animals on other people's estates and lands. They lived with neither individuality nor the awareness of human rights. During that time, the tribal people lived in dense forests constructing small huts, known as 'koppa', using bamboo sticks. Their living conditions were terrible; they did not have proper cloths to wear. The birds, animals, edible roots, fruits, and vegetables were their main food source. They were very hard workers, but at the same time, they were superstitious, uncultured and were away from all norms of the society.

Ranga Rao wanted to change the living conditions of these tribal people. He was worried to see them in that

condition and spent much of his time thinking how to change the way of life for these people. He wanted to educate them and eagerly wanted to see them living like cultured human beings. Ranga Rao's only dream was to see the Untouchables and tribal people enjoying all of the social privileges afforded to Indians at the time.

Ranga Rao wanted to develop small-scale industries to help these people become self employed. But Ranga Rao's intentions were not so easy to fulfill. He faced much opposition (with money to back up these oppositions) from traditional and upper caste people as well as his own family members; however, Ranga Rao knew his goal very well. His determination and, his will power was stronger and this helped him to overcome all the difficulties (Padbidri cited in Radha and Saguna, 1971; Interview with Mr. Balachandra Kavur, 2010).

### **Distribution of lands for agriculture and houses for the untouchables**

Ranga Rao was able to secure lands from rich land owners by either buying the property himself or for Moola geni land holdings (this system is known as tenure system, in the Kannada language). There are two versions, Moola geni (protected tenant with certain rights being the hereditary one) and Chala geni (tenant at will not being hereditary). He distributed these lands to the downtrodden people to construct houses and build irrigation system.

At the Kapikadu colony in Mangalore, he constructed a 'Sabha Bhavan' known as 'Star Hole' for the lower caste peoples where they could use it for prayer, bajanas (singing devotional songs) and daily worship. According to Ranga Rao's instructions, each Saturday, people gathered there for bajanas and prayers. This was like a social gathering; here he also encouraged cultural activities. Before going for prayer at 'Star Hole', Ranga Rao took all the Untouchables to 'Mundan', to take bath, where the place the natural waterfall situated. Due to this system, the Untouchables were able to take baths before they visited the temples.

Ranga Rao also imposed certain restrictions for the lands, which he had given to these people. First, these lands should not be sold to others at any cost. Second, with-in the Untouchables classification (amongst the Untouchables themselves) if they want to sell the land, they must get permission from DCM office. He constructed entrance doors for both the Bejai Kapikadu and Daddalakadu Colonies; he used to lock these doors during the night time. Even if the police, government employees, or any others wanted to enter the respective colony they were requested to get Ranga Rao's permission first. This system was to bring discipline among the Untouchables by avoid unnecessary interference of the upper caste people.

Sri Ranga Rao expanded his working premises and

allotted lands for the Untouchables at Bannanje, Udyavara (in Udupi), Pannamburu, Tannirubavi, and Bykampadi. In Babugudde (in Mangalore), he, with the help of government, parceled lands for the Untouchables and opened a primary school for this segment of the caste system.

Dr. Benegal Raghavendra Rao, one of the famous doctor of the region and also the cousin brother of the Ranga Rao donated around 7 acres of land at Udupi for this downtrodden people and Ranga Rao distributed those lands for the Untouchables, who didn't have any settlements.

Ranga dug two wells for the Untouchables at Kunjibettu as well as struggled to acquire jobs for these people at 'Panchayat' and 'Municipality'. These constructive works helped and to bring a new spirit of social awareness among the Untouchables (Kamalaksha, 1986: 36-39).

### **Spreading of vocational education by DCM Institution**

Ranga Rao was aware of the importance of basic education. Hence, DCM and Ashrama Schools gave equal importance to vocational courses along with reading and learning. Vocational skills included carpentry, weaving, horticulture, Seri culture (Sericulture, or silk farming, is the rearing of silkworms for the production of raw silk), painting, and embroidering. Sri Paddu Master, who studied at DCM School, later worked as a teacher at 'Panchama School' at Bannanje; this school was the board school for Udupi district. Later, the students who studied in these Panchama Schools opened many Panchama Schools at Kundapura, Hangarakatte, Brahmavar, Malpe, Chitpady, Thonse, and Udyavara<sup>6</sup>.

India is an agricultural country and her people depend on the cottage industries; so Ranga Rao gave primary importance to vocational courses. Ranga Rao had foresighted, integrity and intellect. He thought twice before taking any decision, but never changed his mind once he decided upon a course of actions. He worked hard to bring the Untouchables into the mainstream of Indian culture.

Some of the schools, started by Ranga Rao, were turned into aided government schools in later 19th Century. Due to the pressure and proficiency of Ranga Rao, the downtrodden people, for the first time got the facilities in 'district board' and 'municipal council' (A municipal council is the local government of a municipality. Specifically the term can refer to the institutions of various countries that can be translated by this term. In English it can refer to what are also called city councils and town councils). Sriman Angara Master was elected a member of the district board. Similarly, municipal council appointed Sri Govinda Mastar, a teacher from Udupi, as representative of the Untouchable

caste in the Mangalore Municipality.

In order to improve their financial status and to develop cooperation among themselves, Ranga Rao to set-up a cooperative society. Likewise, for the first time for the Untouchables, he established "Court Hill Adi Dravida Sahakara Sangha" at Shedigudde, Mangalore, (which is one of the Untouchable cooperative society). Ranga Rao ran a high school at Court Hill (Mangalore). Students had the facility to study until the 8th standard at this School.

Along with the untouchables, upper caste children were also studied here. Sriman Govinda Rao from Udupi, worked around 18 years as a teacher in this institution, so he brought honor to the DCM Institution. Ranga Rao constructed new houses at 'Koddelu' for the Koraga tribes, who surrounded the school. Ranga Rao made arrangements to admit the lower caste children, who completed their 8th standard, to the Government College at Mangalore in 1922 (Kamalaksha, 1973: 41 to 42).

### **The enormous wish of Ranga Rao**

Before his death, Ranga Rao wanted to see at least one depressed caste student complete the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) board exam, but his wish was not fulfilled. Another wish of his was to see at least one student, from the lower caste or lower Class, complete his degree, secure a good job and become the owner of his own vehicle.

Ranga Rao wanted to see this student travelling in his own vehicle with the dust cloud covering his head and prove that all the dreams he dreamt for the welfare of the Untouchables can come true. Only then his life and his work would become meaningful; however, his wish was not fulfilled.

Along with the upliftment of the Untouchables, he also dedicated his life for the betterment of widowed women he tried to educate them as well as marry off the 'Devadasi' girls (in Hinduism, the Devadasi tradition "servant of god" is a religious tradition in which girls are "married" and dedicated to a deity or to a temple). He opened an 'Ashrama' for widows (Kamalaksha, 1973: 44).

### **Refugee home for women**

After the 1st World War, the world experienced famine. During this time, Ranga Rao distributed rice and kerosene. Ranga Rao dreamt of building a separate school for weaker women and child widows. (Glaring gender discrimination among Hindus exists in India over the centuries. Whereas a widower can remarry as many times as he likes, a widow cannot remarry irrespective of her age. Since child-marrriages were common, the position of child-widows was pitiable, since their very existence or seeing their face early in the morning was

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr. P.Kamalaksha, Sooterpete, on 9/10/2008

considered a bad omen). During his lifetime, he could not accomplish much to this goal of providing education to these segments of the Indian population. After his death, Dr. Benegal Raghavendra Rao, donated land to this cause and Ranga Rao's wish came true.

In commemoration of Ranga Rao, "Swami Ishwarananda Mahila Sevashrama" was opened in front of Bunt's hostel in Mangalore by Dr. Benegal Raghavendra Rao. Later, Ranga Rao's relative, the late Nayampalli Ramaraya, shifted this "Ashrama" to Kudkorigudde in Kankanadi (Kamalaksha, 1973: 44).

### **Ranga Rao's prayer to overcome the financial crisis**

Ranga Rao faced severe financial crisis running his institutions. He requested many honorable people for monetary donations. He was a staunch believer in God, and always prayed to him for help. Many times he himself, with the help of his friends walked along the street asking for rice, coconuts and other things for the depressed children. Later, Mundappa Bangera and Late Narasappayya, like shadows, supported Ranga Rao in this campaign (Kamalaksha, 1973: 45).

### **THE MISFORTUNE FACED BY RANGA RAO'S CHILDREN FROM UPPER-CASTE PEOPLE**

Due to his reformation work, Ranga faced many problems and insults from the society he lived within. Even his own Saraswath community people excommunicated him from their community. Against this action, Ranga Rao filled litigation in the court and won. Even though this became a personal matter, at that time this issue was very famous. His daughters faced a lot of problems and insults from the upper caste people also.

Finally, Ranga Rao sent his daughters by carriage to school. Even there the others students from the upper caste background tortured them. Barbers were not ready to shave Ranga Rao. The washer man did not accept Ranga's clothes for washing.

Mischievous boys threw stones at him while he was walked along the road. Ranga Rao was not taken aback by all these things; he never lost his patience, instead, he bears all these insults. His wife Rukmini Devi, was the backbone all of his works. Her soothing words always gave strength to Ranga Rao. Her helping nature, sacrifices, advice, counsel, co-operation and her worship toward Ranga Rao, helped him to overcome all the difficulties and insults (Pandit, 1928 cited in Radha and Saguna, 1971).

### **INFLUENCE OF HIS WORK IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES**

The name and fame of Ranga Rao, his social work, his concern for the backward caste society spread to foreign

countries. Many foreigners wrote letters praising his workers. Foreigners were very proud of him. Some well-known personalities used to send money for DCM office's library which brought more fame to Ranga Rao as the library started by him was full of good and valuable books. Even Henry Ford, the famous American Industrialist, sent money to the DCM office.

Ten years after Ranga Rao's death, a foreign Industrialist, Justice Wilbert, in his will, donated a thousand dollars to DCM's office. Great governors and, famous personalities who came to visit Mangalore always visited the DCM's office at Shedigudde.

World famous personalities like Rabindranatha Tagore, Deenabandhu C.F Andrews, Dr. Annie Besant, and Mahatma Gandhi, praised Ranga Rao's work and his concern for the Untouchables. The founder of 'Servants of Indian Society', Sri Gopalkrishna Gokhale from Mumbai, great social reformers like Sriman Thakkar Bapa, Sri G.K Devadhar, and the Right Honorable Sri Srinivasa Sastri, were Ranga Rao's friends as well as patrons of his DCM Institution. Dr. Karnads, a member of Brahma Samaj, donated 10,000 rupees to the DCM Institution. With this donation, Ranga Rao constructed 'Dr. Karnads' Orphanage and Boarding House' in memory of Dr. Karnads' at Shedigudde.

### **THE TEACHER OF MAHATMA GANDHI**

February 24th 1934, at 5 o'clock p.m., Gandhi, along with his followers, reached Mangalore from Madikeri. In between these two stops, at the places like Sampaje, Sulya, Puttur, and 'Raagi Kumeru', an untouchable colony, Gandhi delivered his speeches and requests to the people to donate for the eradication of the Untouchables' classification. His listeners open-heartedly gave donations to Gandhi. Even at Mangalore, people, especially the Untouchables, were eager to receive Gandhi. They decorated their houses and the streets to welcome Gandhi and traveled from far away villages to Mangalore to see Gandhi<sup>7</sup>

On 1934, February 24th evening, around 7 o'clock p.m. Gandhi visited DCM office in Shedigudde. Gandhi was arranging for his interview at the 'Prayer home' of DCM. People were full of bewilderment and gathered over there to see Gandhi. (Gandhi was the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian Independence Movement). It was difficult to control the mob as it grew in size. Due to this gathering, a part of the front portion of the DCM hall collapsed. Gandhi, soon after coming to the 'vidya nilaya', reviewed the children's art works and handy crafts; he appreciated their creativity.

The Untouchable students, with the help of their

<sup>7</sup> Source: Interview with Babu Amin, Member of DSS, Indrali, Udupi, on 12/11/2009

teachers, sung a welcoming song for Gandhi. He was very happy to hear and see the children singing. Later, Gandhi addressed the gathering crowd. Finally, he acknowledged Kudmul Ranga Rao's work and his concern on the behalf of the Untouchables. He considered Ranga Rao as 'his teacher' and openly declared this sentiment. Later, Gandhi spoke a few words to the students. He congratulated them on the facilities they had acquired and reminded them of their duties, which include; owning the property, acquiring status in the society, equal rights in social and privileges of the society and spoke a few good words towards Ranga Rao, even though they were celebrating the 6th year anniversary of his death. Gandhiji then distributed sweets, clothe to the students, and blessed them (Kamalaksha, 1986: 50-54; Gazetteer of South Kanara, 1973; Rao cited in Radha and Saguna, 1971).

### **Depressed classes mission (DCM): An ideal school**

After getting inspiration from the works of 'Brahmo Samaj', started in 1828 at Kolkata by Rajaram Mohan Roy, some people wanted to open a branch of their own in Mangalore. Among them, Ullala Raghunathayya was a very important participant. He was supported by Bharadwaja Shivram, Sri Arasappa, Karnad Sadashiva Rao and others. As a result of their efforts, in 1870 in the month of May, they opened a branch of Brahmo Samaj at Mangalore. As a member of Brahmo Samaj, theosophical society and people of great positions donated to Ranga Rao's DCM office. Karnad Sadashiva Rao is one of the people who helped run 'Panchamas primary schools' (separate schools for the Untouchables).

Sadashiva Rao was a great fan of Ranga Rao and was full of praise for Ranga Rao's work. He wanted to dedicate himself for DCM office but unfortunately he joined the Congress party where he worked for the Untouchables by participating in the rallies to abolish 'untouchability' at Mysore and Bangalore.

Rang Rao and Sri Gopal Swami, a famous personality, tried to remove untouchability by wandering around two months in Mangalore. Sadashiva Rao helped DCM Institution beyond his limits. He rendered all his help to Ranga Rao by constructing schools, ashramas and hostels for the Untouchables.

The schools, ashramas, and hostels run by DCM office were considered an ideal institution. It taught discipline, values education and tried to import moral values for students. Students were aware of cleanliness; Ranga Rao never allowed a student to wear dirty, untidy clothes to the depressed castes students.

Every-day, twice, students should pray as Ranga Rao gave importance to prayer. Students used to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning; after bathing they had to assemble in the prayer hall. After prayer, students had to read until around 8:30 a.m. when students were provided

with breakfast. Later, they went to the school. In the evening, they had to do some vocational work, then later they played. Ranga Rao also took care of the health of these students.

In summary, Ranga Rao gave importance to not only education but also co-curricular activities in his 'Ashrama'. This helped the physical and mental development of the children. In recognition of his social and philanthropic work, Government conferred on him the title of 'Rao Sahib', which explores his greatness and efforts in relation to remove untouchable problem of the India society.

Ranga Rao gave importance to 'swadeshi dress' and never wanted any publicity for the social services he had done. Once, a student called Ramachandra, who was basically from Udupi, and was studying in the primary school at Shedigudde, wrote a poem in honor of Ranga Rao. Later, the student showed that poem to Ranga Rao. After hearing the poem, Ranga Rao started to cry, with full of tears he said to the boy that he was not worthy of such praise and tribute. He also asked for a promise from the boy that they never sing that song till he alive. This incident is a good example of his opposition self-praise and his simplicity (Kamalaksha, 1986: 55-60).

### **RANGA RAO'S OPPOSITION TO THE OLD ORTHODOX BELIEFS**

Ranga Rao was against killing of animals for Gods and Goddess, and other such practices. He used to give public speeches in the colonies to teach the Untouchables to discard (give-up) such practices; instead he encouraged group prayers where he preached unity and brotherhood during these evening gatherings. He felt very bad and was sad to see the ineffectiveness of these gatherings because even though people come to attend these speeches, they were not eager to follow or change themselves.

Once Ranga Rao saw the Koraga cult people with their flutes, drums and even with women's dress when they were dancing in front of a shop, Ranga Rao felt very bad and approached them to talk gently and he took them to the school. There he tried to change their mindsets. He requested them to leave their laziness and work hard to earn their livelihood and advised them to stop their habit of begging. His words were very effective and heart-touching. He cried silently to see the wretched condition of the Koraga people. He understood that to improve the life-style of the Koraga people the construction of houses was necessary. Mean-while, he gave importance to the education and job oriented courses, which would help them to live independently. In order to achieve this goal, he dedicated himself to serve the Untouchable comm.-unity.

The whole life of Kudmul Ranga Rao was one of

voluntary poverty, strenuous service, and fullness of love. He has left a precious heritage (Rao, 1938 in Shankar, 1938: 132).

### **The flag established by Ranga Rao and its intention**

The people of different castes and creeds were the members of DCM office. There were students' processions during some important moments. In these rallies, students carried flag up-to DCM office. The flag had its own speciality- shining with different colors and used to spread the words of DCM office to the people. The flag contained the pictures of a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Christian who sat on a high plat-form. Besides them, a small pond having a pig and an Untouchable sitting on the shore; our reverend mother India, holding India's flag and trying to uplift the Untouchable.

Upliftment of the depressed classes' people, (Deenodharanam), and 'welfare of the state' (Deshodharanam), were the slogans of DCM and was placed on the top of the flag. The processions using the flag showed the objectives and the words of Ranga Rao to the people.

Even though he gave the power of DCM office to the control of The Servants of Indian Society, he maintained the practice of visiting the Institution often. While prayer was going on, he used to give lectures on discipline, good manners, and respecting others to the students. He wanted the students to recite the following 'Shloka' (hyme) every-day.

'Om| twameva maatachapitaa twameva|  
twameva bandhushcha sakhaa twameva||  
twameva vidya dravinam twameva|  
twameva sarva mama deva devaha: ||

It means: You are my Mother; you are my  
Father;  
You are my Relative; you are my Friend;  
You are my Education; you are my affluence;  
You are everything, O' my Lord.

### **DCM OFFICE UNDER THE SUBORDINATION OF THE GOVERNMENT**

In India, The Servants of India Society is one of the first and foremost institutions working for the development, progress and betterment of the Untouchables in the entire sphere of life. Many graduates surrendered themselves to work in this office; so Ranga Rao transferred the DCM Institution to The Servants of India Society. This act allowed the education for Untouchables to continue even after he passed. The Servants of Indian Society appointed Sriman R. Sooryanarayana Rao, as a secretary for the DCM office. Later, after a few years, in

1953, DCM office surrendered all its properties and educational institutions to the Madras Government (Nirody, 1971 cited in Radha and Saguna, 1971: 65).

### **LIFE AS A SAGE**

The last span of his life, Ranga Rao spent most of his time in prayers and religious activities at Brahmo Samaj. He used the Kannada language to give sermons in the assemblies at Brahmo Samaj. In those speeches, he used to praise the foreigners who came to his country, and learned Kannada language and used this tongue to preach their religion. He used to give importance to the mother tongue that is Kannada language, which is regional language in the state of Karnataka.

After giving up his all institutions under the control of Servants of Indian Society, he lost interest in his life. Ranga Rao Decided to take sanyasa: Sanyasa is the order of life of the renouncer within the scheme of life stages. (It is considered the topmost and final stage of the ashrama systems and is traditionally taken by men or women at or beyond the age of fifty years old or by young monks who wish to renounce worldly and materialistic pursuits and instead dedicate their entire life towards spiritual pursuits).

In 1924, it was arranged that Maharshi, the disciple of Dayananda Saraswathi, Shridananda Swamiji would come to Mangalore for a second time, to the inauguration function of Arya Samaj. Ranga Rao decided to take sanyasa from him but his desire was not fulfilled because someone murdered Shruddananda Swamiji at Delhi. But Ranga Rao's decision was firm.

Finally, in1927 he took sanyasa from Suvicharananda Swamy, a disciple of Shruddananda Swamiji. He received the name called 'Ishwarananda Swamiji' from Vidya Vaachaspathi. He gave up the title 'Rao Saheb' given to him by the government and also the records of his work in that particular day and got relief material attachments and desires. Ranga Rao did not do anything for his children except the education he had given to them. He left a small house at Kadri and some of the important books for his children, but with time both were lost. His descendents never tried to retain them (Kamalaksha, 1986: 66).

### **THE LAST STAGE**

During last days of his life, Ranga Rao had only one desire in his life that was after his death, the 'Thoti' people, (one of the most backward people among the Untouchables, today known as Adi-Dravida) should take his dead body to the graveyard. He had mentioned this request in his will. He blamed himself for not doing much good things; bring change in the Untouchables life-style. He was very sad to see the poor living conditions of these



people, so he requested the 'Thoti' people to arrange his funeral pyre, which may bring peace to his departing soul. This was his last desire and prayer.

The last day of Ranga Rao was not a bed of roses. His health condition was not good since he was suffering from a heart disease called Coronary Thrombosis. He did not want to live for long. He used to pray get to take his life as soon as possible. He spent his last span of his life with his elder daughter, Mrs. Lalitha Bai. Even though he was sad, as he could not fulfill and complete some of his desires, he was happy because of meaningful life he had led.

Finally, he breathed his last calling to the God Narayana. His hopes for the Untouchables, and widows of the first, were shattered along with his death. Like the 'Sun' who gives light to all of us during day and sinks as soon as it becomes dark, Ranga Rao's life's span came to an end. Ranga Rao became the light for the Untouchables, humbled people in India, and widows and finally the divine light reached its end. Ranga Rao, who brought a drastic change in the life of the Untouchables, finally left this world.

He was 69 years old when he died on 1928 January 30 when he started his journey towards the heavenly abode. This day was became a black day for the Untouchables. The news spread like wild-fire all over the district. People from different parts of the district came to see his dead body resting at his eldest daughter Smt. Lalitha Bai's house which was situated at Shivabhag at Kadri, Mangalore. His last wish was disclose before all the people; people rushed to carry his body to the cemetery.

Here too, trouble from fundamental minds did not end. The upper class people opposed the Untouchables' touching of Ranga Rao's body. But Sri Subbanna Rao (his son-in-law) intervened and pacified the crowd; he respected the will's wishes and finally, as per Sri Ranga Rao's wish the thoti people carried his body (Thoti is another local name for koraga community people).

At around 3 o'clock, his body was taken out of Sri Subbanna Rao's house. With a huge procession, accompanied by silent prayer, it passed through Nandigudde's Brahma Samaj mandir towards the cemetery. Sadly, this great man's eternal message and principles have remained unfulfilled. There is still a vacuum because of the changed mind set of the people. His dream remains as a dream even after his death. Ranga Rao's honest thinking has value today. Ironically, his continuous efforts and teachings on behalf of the Untouchables have no takers.

Ranga Rao never loved or wanted any position. He never thought about himself or his family. He never wanted any publicity; his only ideal was the upliftment of the Untouchables. He wanted that they should gain respect in the Indian society. He wanted them to be educated and that they should live independently, and be good human beings with self-respect. In order to achieve

this goal, he dedicated his life and experienced a number of hardships. His own people boycotted him. Many days and nights he spent thinking about the Untouchables. He prayed to God for the same. Finally, he received sanyasa.

Ranga Rao's life was varied and wide in his sympathies. Whoever knocked at the door of his heart for moral or monetary support found an easy entrance there. Kindness and courtesy were almost a religion with him. He was extremely simple and thrifty. Mr. Ranga Rao's friendship was always devoted, most affectionate and loyal. His faith in prayer and God was unbounded. Whether in happiness or in grief, his first thought was of God. There is no other person like a holy man; simple, sacrificial, creative constructive was Ranga Rao in and around the whole South Canara. Ranga Rao dedicated himself for society and in-turn built a new history. It is very difficult to find a man like Ranga Rao in today's time and perhaps the future.

Ranga Rao's words, objectives, his experiences, his constructive humanistic works became the light for today's youth. By following his path, his word, and by bringing his creative works into practice by the Untouchable youths they are the greatest tributes to Ranga Rao. It will surely give peace to his eternal soul (Kamalaksha, 1986: 67-73).

Kudmul Ranga Rao, as a social reformer, strove to uplift the Untouchables by focusing on issues like land, employment, housing and education on the one hand and intellectual and spiritual enrichment on the other. Rao wanted to lead Dalits (Untouchable castes) on socio-religious lines that were being fashioned at that time.

However, as a great social reformer, he did everything for the well-being of the Untouchables at the cost of his family. His intervention in the life of the Untouchables in Dakshina Kannada was a major event. There was a remarkable unity between his precepts and practice. He practiced at the level of the locality a set of inclusionary practices, unique in their own way, which was one of the main tendencies at the national level too at that time.

In Kudmul Ranga Rao, the ideas of enlightenment and liberalism were joined with deep sensibility about injustice, an urge for social service, and a practical active attitude of mind. He was inspired by a universal humanism, seeing the downtrodden Shudras and outcasts as members of one human family, endowed with equal rights by the one creator of all, and destined to live as brothers/sisters with egalitarian happiness.

## LIMITATIONS

Despite these positive features, it is believed that a number of challenges restrict the future scope of depressed classes movement which was started by Kudmul Ranga Rao in the later nineteenth century. The following are a few limitations which were found during the study undertaken.

1. Social reform activities initiated by Kudmul Ranga Rao were more or less restricted to the limited geographical area of former South Kanara district rather than other parts of the state. It has also seems to bring about partial changes in value system of a particular region but neither affect structural changes nor do they bring radical changes in the social and cultural systems. Further, Kudmul Ranga Rao was considered as a sole upholder and first man who was fought for the emancipation of depressed classes people of the region in later part of the nineteenth century.
2. Kudmul Ranga Rao could contemplate a reform in the social, economic and religious sphere, but not in the political sphere. He first carried out his plan for social emancipation of depressed classes through reforming rather than through revolting or discarding the existing system. Perhaps, such sentiments were not likely to find favour in the rising tide of nationalistic consciousness.
3. The complicated nature of the social forces, the historiography of the early period of this region is often wont to take a simplistic view of the rigid chasm that divided the progressives from the conservatives.
4. The last span of his life Ranga Rao spent most of his time in prayers and religious activities of Brahma Samaj and finally Ranga Rao took 'Sanyasa'. It may create the gap between earthly worldliness and other worldliness.
5. Success of the any movement depends on nature and degree of involvement of the participants, location, size of population, exposure to outside communities, level of economic and historical experience. In this regard, intensity towards mobility of the depressed classes of the region will not be strong. Various attempts were initiated by the Kudmul Ranga Rao through his unorthodox and radical ideas which set in motion a movement for social reform at different levels. These attempts, although, did not break the citadel of orthodoxy completely but did make dents which could be turned into big openings by later day achievements.

## CONCLUSION

The educational reform movement initiated by Kudmul Ranga Rao has clear ideology, leadership, aims and objectives. The spirit of this social movement brought about a lot of changes slowly but surely for certain segments of India's caste system.

As Oommen (1985) suggests that, a situation of strain in a society may be met the response pattern through crystallization of a new ideology, which champions the cause of the deprived, and establishment of a new organization to deal with the problem at hand. It is argued that each of these developments may give rise to the emergence of three distinct types of movements-charismatic, ideological and organizational.

The same tendency is found in the case of the

movement of Kudmul Ranga Rao. It was started against the situation of strain in the society in the form of social discrimination, dissatisfaction, disharmony, upper castes oppression, exploitation and all other kinds of injustice towards depressed classes over a period of time. All these factors contributed to the Ranga Rao to focus on the crystallization of new ideology and organize the movement based on change oriented.

The civil rights ideology based on democracy, motivated the depressed classes to evolve campaigns to fight for equality in educational, social and economic opportunities. The movement also incorporated the religious-cultural ideology in this approach in seeking to gain identity, self-respect and honour.

Simultaneously, both civil right ideology and religious-cultural ideology in their efforts to attain equality of status with the dominant groups on the ritual and the secular planes. Ranga Rao's Movement had developed as a 'reformative movement' within the Hindu religion. As explained by Ghanshyam (1980), a reformative movement tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability.

Movement led by Ranga Rao emerged based on the principle of revitalization as a theme of protest ideology. Wallace (1956) has defined revitalization as a conscious organized on the part of some members of a society to create more satisfying culture. It is also considered to be an adoptive process in establishing equilibrium, which is a postulate of the structural functional approach. Ranga Rao was responsible for a thorough transformation on the life style of depressed classes involving education, new religious beliefs, ritual, practice and outlook to create egalitarian society.

Attracted from Brahma faith and other liberal thoughts, Ranga Rao believed in one God, spiritual equality and high moral and cultural life. He aspired for a better educational system, equality, justice, law and liberty within the caste system itself. This awakening found articulation in South Kanara towards the last quarter of the 19th century. Ranga Rao's movement played an important instrumental role in changing the socio-economic status of depressed classes in the district.

Among the depressed classes, the Untouchables adopted the ideology of imitation of the high caste manners and also attracted towards the liberal approaches of the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and activities of the Basel Mission. All these sects believed in education, secular and egalitarian ideology. Imitation of upper caste including vegetarianism, adopting upper caste dress, manners, ceremonies rituals and following clean professions and skills, they would be able to elevate themselves to higher position in the caste hierarchy.

Most of the Untouchables followed the process of sanskritisation that Hinduised the Dalits to a great extent. As stated by Ranga Rao, the factor like, education stands

out above all others. Educated people tend to be different; education; engenders a kind of self confidence.

The spread of education to large numbers among the subordinated Untouchables has intended to infuse them with a new and more ambitious culture. Above all, education tends to invest a person with sense of entitlement to equal treatment in matters of common human concern.

Ranga Rao assessed the nature of social change among the Untouchables of South Kanara due to social mobilization. He built an alternative value system and new social identity for deprived people. Lower caste people entered in to the education and Government jobs, industry, commerce and business and politics.

Education played a significant role in the realization of the oppression and suppression of the depressed. This community is highly successful in terms of education, employment, economy, politics and culture during independence.

The caste system of today in undivided Dakshina Kannada is not the same as it was a hundred years ago. However, social life of Dalits, for wherever and whenever they assert their legitimate rights. This is due to historical developments in connection to education, socio-economic and cultural activities. It also noted that efforts made by social and religious leaders such as, Ranga Rao and others were contributed towards the reformation of social life parallel to the education initiatives of the region. The social consciousness generated by the Dalit communities has played a very effective and important role in making them confident enough to gear up their struggle against age-old discrimination. This consciousness may be termed as "Dalit consciousness".

Ranga Rao tried to emancipate and liberate depressed classes from the yokes of all kinds, manmade and otherwise. His emancipation approaches seemed to have the same tendency found in the holistic dimension and transparency dimension as explained by Laclau (1996), in his book called *Emancipation(s)*.

As explained by Laclau, in holistic dimension, emancipation affects all areas of social life and there is a relation of essential imbrications between its various contents in these different areas. In transparency dimension, the emancipation presupposes the elimination of power, the abolition of the subject and object distinction. Available evidences indicates that Ranga Rao's emancipation approaches intend to deal with the notion of enabling people to take control of their own lives and to free themselves from the structures which dominate and constrain them.

Depressed Classes Movement of Ranga Rao in later part of the nineteenth century has its limited spatial spread, confined societal scope, declared intentions, actual achievements and social consequences. Any social movement is an organized effort by an individual, group, or community to achieve particular goal. With regard to this, the available evidence indicates that social

movement led by Ranga Rao was methodologically sound and significant in various respects. It reflects the indicators of social movements as defined by social scientists (Gusfield, 1968; Wilson, 1973), the social movement logically belongs to the realm of social process, mobilization, the presence of an ideology and an orientation towards change. Ranga Rao epitomized the positive effect of introducing social change

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