

Sadhu Kochu Kunju: An apostle of South India

Sadhu Kochu Kunju, an apostle of Christ from the South India, was born in a village, called, Edayarammala, on the river of Pampa in the state of Kerala during 1883. He dedicated his life to the Lord Jesus, when he was 11 years old. Since the child marriage was the order of the day, *Sadhu Kochu Kunju* was married when he was 12 years old. A year after his marriage, he lost his mother. His father was a poor agriculturist. He also expired later when *Sadhu Kochu Kunju* was twenty years old.

In stature *Sadhu Kochu Kunju* was unimposing. He was more than 5 feet tall, with a lean body. His forehead bore wrinkles. His eyes alone showed hints of some exploding thoughts. His attire was so simple that it deceived strangers into thinking that "here was a man of no consequence". Dhoti (a typical dress - wrap around - of the Indian State of Kerala & Tamil Nadu in the South India in place of a pant), shirt and a shawl - all in white - constituted his dress. One hand carried an umbrella while the other kept the Bible close his bosom. This was the live figure of *Sadhu Kochu Kunju*, the man with the aura of a saint.

A life of great struggle and of loneliness

Sadhu Kochu Kunju did not want to spend his life on agriculture or business. He had to make a bitter struggle for existence. Poverty was rampant in his family. He was a man of prayers. He took a decision only after his prayers.

He was in the isle of loneliness due to severe ordeals in his life. Physical strain, mental torture and financial crisis converged on him to intensify his misery. He fell a prey to various ailments. All his contacts with the outside world were severed. He confined himself to a dim dungeon. His wife had gone home, taking the children with her. There was no one to help him. Those who were dear and near avoided him. Relatives and villagers alike sneered at him. But there were a few to lend him a helping hand. To him, they too were a thorn in the flesh. Acute pain and constant grief and dejection kept him company. Bible reading, meditation and prayer sustained him.

The rudest shock of his life came with the demise of his second son Samuel Kutty. He had fervently prayed for his son's life. But God had willed it otherwise. He was convinced that God was offering him the goblet of grief. He knew that he was bound to accept the goblet willingly.

Barred from all worldly contacts, Kochu Kunju was doing penance in the dungeon of his house. When he came out, he had acquired the insight of an ascetic. He had gained confidence and fortitude from his stay with "Him whom my soul loveth". He had meditated on the Songs of Solomon and viewed the Songs as heavenly music revealed to his soul for its delight by his beloved Rabbi at a time when divine grace had led him away from all worldly pleasures. The gloomy dungeon became the cradle of divine revelations.

Kochu Kunu observed: *"A Christian can attain perfection in Christian life only after stepping out of the world. In a wide-open place, mind tends to be open with no hindrances. In the same way, a Christian who sees not or looks not at anything of the world, steps out of the world to wear the cosmopolitanism of eternity"*.

A man of a very simple life with simple food habits

The aversion Kochu Kunju had for worldly pleasures had sprung from his passion for a life of devotion. He extricated himself from sensuous enjoyments. Even in the prime of youth, he had departed from sensual pleasures.

He had also exercised great caution in the choice of food. If he had felt a liking for any particular food, he had eluded it. Daytime was spent in fasting, eating nothing and drinking only water. Each time he had only a handful of rice usually taken after ten at night. If many varieties of food is served, **he used to wait till he see the divine light on those three items food God had selected for his consumption for that particular time. He restricted the number of meals to nineteen times a month.** After having meals for nine consecutive nights, he would forego food on the tenth day and dink only water. This was his mode of offering the tithe of food to God. He never touched fish or meat. These were the rigorous practices he had followed before he was thirty years and he continued them unfalteringly for more than thirty years.

Ministry of gospel and of social work

Throughout the length and breadth of Kerala and in many parts of South India, the voice of Kochu Kunju was heard pronouncing the message of the gospel. For 30 years he traveled ceaselessly to preach the gospel. His work was not confined to the preaching of the gospel alone. He also blew the trumpet of social reformation. He spearheaded a movement against dowry, a social evil. As a prophet, he raised his voice against the social evil of dowry, a long-standing practice amongst the Christians of Kerala to give dowry for the marriage of their daughters.

He did not spare the selfish traders of his time. He formulated guidelines for business ethics. He urged businessmen to be thoroughly honest, gentle, kind-hearted, and to be evangelists. He took the lead in establishing shelters for the old people. He always cared for the poor and the destitute. He encouraged the establishment of orphanages.

His heart was full of compassion for the poor. He was particular that none in his village should go to bed without supper. He supplied the poor, who could not afford supper, with rice and other things. He also provided for the supply of these things to them from one shop or other. The shopkeeper was asked to give the poor what they needed and to debit it to his account. He helped the poor in building their dwelling places. He gave monetary assistance to poor parents who gave away their daughters in marriage.

One night, it was raining heavily. The wind was like a tempest. A young boy was out drenched in rainwater. He knocked at many doors for shelter. No one admitted him in. *Sadhu* took the boy home. The boy was bathed and was given dry clothes and food. He was also given a cot to sleep. *Sadhu* sat by his side, patted him gently and embraced him.

Cholera ravaged Southern Travancore. Every house was deprived of three or four members. People fled their villages in panic. They did not remain there even to bury the dead. Dead bodies lay unburied and babies lay sucking the breasts of dead mothers. Rescue operation of the Government was not forthcoming. *Sadhu* and his team boldly set out on relief operations. Ignoring the danger to their own lives, *Sadhu* and his team visited the afflicted people in their houses and nursed them. They buried the dead and looked after the orphans. In Marthandam, Tamil Nadu, he started an orphanage to take care of the destitute.

As a result of his meetings, habitual drunkards, men of abominable iniquity, rioting or witchcraft, and ex-convicts were awakened into a sense of deep guilt. With tears and wailings, they proclaimed their repentance and openly accepted Christ Jesus. The songs composed by him in Malayalam were equally effective in bringing about spiritual awakening amongst the people.

Sadhu Kochu Kunju was a contemporary of Rev.T Walker, the English man, who was the chief evangelist of the period of spiritual awakening and who resided in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. Dr Stanley Jones of USA and Tamil David were his other contemporaries.

Sadhu went to be with the Lord when he was 62 years old during 1943.

If you happen to pass by the house in which *Sadhu* lived i.e. the Moothambackal House, you will notice a chapel in his memory and a rocky pillar with the following inscriptions engraved on it:

"For the honor of the name of Jesus

Travelers who are in difficulty can spend the night here.

(ISAIAH 58:7, MATHHEW 5:13-16)

Observe the Sabbath"

I pray that the Lord may raise up many apostles like *Sadhu* Kochu Kunju in these last days. Are you one of them?