

Role of Ci. Pa. Aditanar in Tamil Revivalism

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I

The present paper entitled role of Aditanar in Tamil Revivalism is an attempt to highlight the role played by Ci. Pa. Aditanar in Tamil Revivalism through his paper *Daily Thanthi*. After the failure of Justice Party and Non-Brahmin Movement, Ci. Pa Aditanar played a vital role to unify the Tamil people for starting a movement called Nam Tamilar Iyyakam to protect the Tamil interests and their culture.

The Aditanar saga—one of enterprise, endeavour, excellence and enduring eminence—should serve as a guide and a handbook of reliable reference to every one connected with the media in this country. The history of journalism with particular reference to the dissemination of information would be incomplete without Aditanar and the pivotal role he played in the growth and popularity of the newspaper industry in Tamil Nadu. It has been universally acknowledged that it was Aditanar who persuaded the 'common man' to read newspapers.¹ When the history of Tamil journalism comes to be written, the services rendered by Aditanar, in fashioning its growth and popularity, would be inscribed in letters of gold. He has played a vital role in the evolution of Tamil ethos, the resurgence of the language and the re-avertment of Tamil identity. His services to Tamil and the Tamil people are immeasurable. It is in the fitness of things that he is fondly referred to as the patriarch, 'the Father of the Tamil race'.²

II

The memory of past glory coupled with a feeling of later inability in the linguistic areas, which were inconveniently grouped in administrative units led to the movement for linguistic unity and for

the formation of linguistic states. The development of regional languages and the spread of nationalism created an awakening among the people. The language, which developed into rich and powerful vehicles of expression, created a sense of unity among the people speaking the same language. Yet under the British system of administration they found themselves divided and scattered in different provinces. In view of the fact that an identical language was generally spoken in a well defined area often with a historical background. The demand for the unification of such areas to form separate states gathered momentum.

The study of Reorganisation of States in India is a fascinating subject for study. Whether reorganisation on linguistic lines was a correct step or it could have been done by any other consideration is a contentious issue even now. But when we look at the experience of several other countries, where bloodshed preceded the formation of regional states, we find that the accomplishment of reorganisation of states had been smooth and peaceful in India. This was to the great foresight and practical wisdom shown by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

In 1911, Tamil was the mother tongue of 17 million people in the south-eastern part of the province, but in the Tamil areas there were also considerable numbers of Telugu speakers, mainly as a result of southerly migrations in the fifteenth century and later during the hegemony of the Vijayangar Kingdom.³ The Tamil Brahmans who comprised only 3.2 per cent of the total population, enhanced their position in the social system by gradually filling the great majority of administrative and educational positions then open to Indians. These Tamil Brahmans had for centuries been respected as the guardians of Sanskritic learning and religion.⁴

The second major division in South Indian society was the non-Brahmins, a group of castes, mostly peasants, who ranked below the Brahmans in Social States but above the untouchables. The most important of these cultivating castes was the Tamil Vellalas. Not only did they form an important part of the rural population but they were also employed in government service, particularly as village revenue Collectors (Karnams) and in trade and commerce. In some districts, such as Tanjore and Tirunelveli, Vellalas were often very orthodox in their religious practice, sometimes even more so than the Brahmans.⁵

These non-Brahmin Hindu castes along with the minority Brahmans and certain other minor groups comprised approximately

four-fifths of the total population of Madras. The remainder were the outcastes or untouchables. Though separated from Brahmans and non-Brahmin caste Hindus in religious and social terms as well as by segregation in village dwelling patterns, they played an essential role in the life of rural Madras. In traditional society they were invariably scavengers and they participated in certain caste Hindu social and religious observances. Here again there was a linguistic division the most important Tamil untouchable were Pariyans, Pulaiyans and Pallans.⁶ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, largely owing to the work of Christian missionaries and the government, outcaste groups, particularly in the Tamil area, were beginning to realise the inequality of their economic as well as ritual status.⁷

In certain parts of the province, particularly the Tamil districts, the society is broadly divided into three large groups—Brahmans, non-Brahmins and untouchables. In the Tamil districts, they also were converts from untouchables but some were Shanar toddy tappers called Nadars.⁸ The modern history of the Nadars begins with the final defeat in 1801 of the Poligars by British forces and the subsequent establishment early in the nineteenth century of radically improved conditions of law and order and communications. This changed circumstances affected the areas where Nadars were concentrated what soon came to be the southern portions of Madras Presidency. The southernmost portion of what was then the Princely State of Travancore. They are today the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Madras state. In these areas Nadars frequently lived in villages in which they were the sole inhabitants or the majority.⁹

Another element that worked to transform long standing caste rivalries into political conflict in the twentieth century centred on the question of whether or not the non-Brahmins could be classified as Sudras. In fact the term Sudra would appear to be used by Brahmans alone in speaking of persons of low condition.¹⁰

All communities to enhance its status and their relations were bound to benefit from the new quota system, which the government was evolving to permit representation of lower status communities in government service. In many ways the Self-Respect Movement has aided in making this quota system acceptable. E.V.R. Periyar also adopted more stringent socialist doctrines which offended many of his patrons.¹¹ It has been said that Tamil Nadu was most affected by non-Brahmin movement whose effect was to gradually displace Brahmans not only from government administration and education

but also to drive them out of formal politics in Tamil Nadu. But many other communities, caste groups, economic groups, religious groups and many others as well. The non-Brahmin movement and the development of provincial politics of which it was a part was simply an element of a great transformation in rural and urban society in Tamil Nadu.¹²

There is no doubt that Thiru.Vi.Ka gave Tamil journalism a literary stature and quality that it had not possessed before. He used a style of Tamil known as *Sen Tamil*, or *Pure Tamil*, to describe political and social ideas, the first time this had been done and his efforts won him great admiration and attracted to him and to the cause of Tamil journalism many who would otherwise have remained untouched by political opinion.

The identification of a Dravidian culture by the Christian missionaries provided non-Brahmins with an opportunity to identify themselves with this ancient Dravidian culture. Their methods of documenting this identification took many forms the formation of political parties; a demand for the recognition of what were thought to be indigenous systems of language, religion and medicine and in the second and third decades of the century, an interest in literature and journalism. Gradually, Tamil was being transformed into a weapon of great power and expressiveness.¹³

This devotion to Tamil and Tamil culture became the central theme of the Self Respect Movement, which adopted the Dravidianism of the Justice Party without its social conservatism. In its ideology the Self Respect Movement combined a strong anti-Brahminism with a desire of levelling society and to give to untouchables and hither to unpoliticised groups a sense of their identity and value in a period of great social upheaval. Their demand for a "Tamilnad was for the Tamilians".

The caste Hindus otherwise called the non-Brahmins benefited a lot only because of the non-Brahmin movement. But among the non-Brahmins the lower caste people had their own grievances for getting education and government jobs. Next to Brahmins the so-called caste Hindus dominated the society and enjoyed all the privileges and concessions provided by the government and they occupied higher posts in government service. Therefore, other lower caste people raised their voices against this high caste people and organised a banner of revolt against this inequality. Consequently, they organised their own caste organisations to demand their rights

and position. They demanded in traditional social arrangements some situations of the means to represent and rule themselves.

Realising the situation Aditanar started a movement called *Nam Tamar Iyakkam* to unify the Tamil people and protect their rights. Tamil separatism therefore, came to represent a distinct threat to Indian unity in the years immediately after independence.

The idea of linguistic reorganisation of Madras Presidency came as a result of political, economic and cultural necessities. The linguistic minorities of the Telugus, the Tamils, the Kannadigas and the Keralites who spread over in a dominant administrative power of a particular language group, created a feeling of isolation in all walks of human activities. Added to it was a memory, real or imaginary, of past glory and a feeling of neglect under the existing system of administration, which led the different linguistic groups to seek cultural and political identity with their fellow linguistic groups. These scattered people realised that their brethren found themselves as practically aliens under an administrative system that was dominated by other linguistic groups. A political identity for different people speaking identical language was fundamental for their political groups and cultural development.¹⁴ Realising the situation all regional newspapers invariably played a vital role to advocate their cause and supported one group or other. As a result, for the formation of Tamil Nadu state a Tamil journalist namely Ci. Pa Aditanar started a Tamil Daily called *Thina Tanthi* which kindled the sentiments of the Tamils to demand a separate state for the Tamils.

III

Through the medium of the newspaper, Aditanar instilled in his readers, a sense of pride in their Tamil identity. None of his compatriots in the 'fourth estate' has been able to have a similar impact, to this day: It could be said that there were journals which roused strong feelings among Tamils from a political perspective. However, it was Aditanar alone who had the distinction of bringing about 'Tamil-centric responses', a verve and a vigor, hitherto unknown in Tamil Nadu for the upholding of Tamil principles and the protection of Tamil interests and rights.¹⁵ Aditanar's main aim while venturing into the 'media field' was to create this kind of awareness among his readers. His success in this regard has been stupendous.¹⁶

Aditanar called upon all Tamils to write and, collectively strive

for the formation of a political dispensation, under which Tamils might aspire to a life of freedom, progress and prosperity. The very first magazine he published was aptly named 'Tamilan', an organ of public opinion, through which he hoped to mobilise all Tamils and pursuit of common destiny. Even in the inaugural issue, Aditanar, in a hard hitting editorial, very clearly set forth his aims and objectives....¹⁷ The *Thina Thanthi* continued to uphold the same principles and policies, always being the first to raise its voice of protest whenever Tamil interests were sought to be eroded or compromised.¹⁸ C.N. Annadurai has made several complimentary references to *Thina Thanthi*, describing it as a sword and also a shield always on hand for the protection of Tamil interests.¹⁹

Prior to the launch of 'Tamilan' and thereafter, the coming of *Thina Thanthi*, the language employed by the print media smacked of prudery and exclusivity so typical of the scholarly elite. Instead of the archaic crudity of elitist expressions, Aditanar boldly opted for the language in common use, the conversational Tamil which impacted directly with the reader's subconscious. The 'Tamil' *Thina Thanthi* clothed was the language of the market place, homesteads, fields, eateries and the roadside.²⁰ In other words, it was the 'living Tamil idiom', the language of the masses with readership of the masses. With readership restricted to the urban elite, some of these papers spiced their reports with a generous admixture of English and Sanskrit idioms and cliches. If some sort of acquaintance with at least two other languages was prerequisite for urban readers, Aditanar plumped for the sort of down to earth Tamil even a half literate rustic could identify as his own. So irresistible was the lure of the plain, frill free Tamil used by *Thanthi* and *Thina Thanthi*, several thousand illiterate/semi literate people evinced a desire to learn the language, the language so deftly handled by Aditanar's dailies.²¹ If the snobbish, high-fault in language of the elitist dailies turned away the common man, the language employed by Aditanar, won for his *Thanthi* and *Thina Thanthi* a readership of millions, something undreamed of in the history of the print media.

Aditanar has always been a champion of 'Press Freedom', particularly the right of the print media to disseminate news. He was highly critical of the restrictions imposed on the media during the second world war. The people, he said, had the right to information and, it was the duty of the press to provide it. The government should not interfere with this freedom, he declared during the days of British rule in India.²²

The very first journal published by Aditanar was *Mahasanam*, a bulletin issued in connection with the 14th state conference of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam held in 1932. *Mahasanam* is a weekly publication of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam even to this day. Even in his formative years in the fourth estate, Aditanar knew the value of public relations and the role-played by the print media in such an exercise.²³

In 1942, when the war was at its fiercest, the imperial government armed itself with draconian powers. The banning of *Madurai Murasu* did not prevent Aditanar from launching a weekly, *Tamilan*. It could be said that this weekly magazine was the first step, the very foundation of Aditanar's vast newspaper empire that came into being over a period of time. That the entry of *Tamilan* synchronised with the Quit India Movement, was no co-incidence. The magazine was in itself, a tool of our freedom movement.²⁴

In the very first issue of *Tamilan*, Aditanar set forth his aims and objectives in summoning all Tamils to a joint struggle for ethnic/linguistic identity. The movement aimed at:

1. Preserving the great traditions of the Tamil people, their language and culture.
2. Creating an economic order that guarantees gainful employment for all able bodied men and women.
3. Eradication of poverty, maintenance of health and the provision of all essential amenities to every one.²⁵

Soon after the launch of *Tamilan*, Aditanar started *Thina Thanthi*, the daily that revolutionised the vernacular print media. Both the weekly (*Tamilan*) and the daily (*Thina Thanthi*) registered an increase in circulation, the former enlarging its readership sevenfold to seven thousand.²⁶ However, the exigencies of the war years and the fall of the Quit India Movement, forced Aditanar to make a difficult choice. With a heavy heart he stopped publication of his favourite *Tamilan* and concentrated totally on *Thina Thanthi*.²⁷

Thina Thanthi's present status as one of the most widely read newspaper in the world is a distinction its founder won for it by the sweat of his brow. The impediments enroute and the road blocks that had to be negotiated were many. Aditanar overcame every obstacle, weathered every storm like the thorough bred he is. Once past the teaching stages and the initial hiccups, the daily surged ahead outstripping other dailies in circulation and facilitating editions from different centres in Tamil Nadu. It found location on Mount Road, Madras in 1959 and the very next year moved over to a four

storyed complex at Egmore. Very soon, it became an integral part of every morning, something of a habit with people like their early morning coffee. To Aditanar alone goes the credit for this great achievement.²⁸

Only the Great Perform Great Deeds

Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, himself a man of stupendous achievement, has paid rich tributes to Aditanar as the only Tamil who had made a mark in the fourth estate. It was a great achievement, said Periyar, in a field strewn with obstacles at every step. To have launched a daily news sheet and made a success of it is a great success story which should enthuse other aspiring entrepreneurs to do likewise. Aditanar might have attained success in several other undertaking but, that which singles him out as a venturesome, indefatigable champion is *Thina Thanthi* with which his name shall always be synonymous.²⁹

Before *Thina Thanthi* hit the stands in Tamil Nadu, the morning newspaper was usually an adjunct at the breakfast table. To Aditanar goes the credit of transforming a newspaper into an integral part of the sidewalk eateries and work spots frequented by the non-elitist segments of society. The radical changes that came upon the political environment in Tamil Nadu could well be attributed to the enlightenment ushered in by the people's daily, *Thina Thanthi*, so opines the editor of *Makkal Kural*, a Tamil newspaper known for its objectivity and impartiality.³⁰

During a period of time, when journals and dailies employed clichè ridden, ambiguous language—some of them reveled in obscure, incomprehensible verbiage—Aditanar used the diction of the common man, the language of everyday use to disseminate news and, in so doing, brought about a political awakening among the masses.³¹

Aditanar has brought out a handbook for journalists, in which he stresses the need to fashion news spreads with the language of the common man, the diction employed by the masses in everyday conversation but with the crudities, such as unseemly slang expunged. To opt for scholarly language is a handicap in regard to communication. It won't reach the masses and is therefore, out of place in a newspaper. In this way, a journal can play its role in the refinement of the spoken word and add dignity to Tamil prose.³²

Thina Thanthi reached out to the semi-literate masses of Tamil

Nadu in a big way by providing information in the language familiar to the least endowed individual. It became the favourite of the masses. It could be said that *Thina Thanthi* helped in reducing illiteracy among elders. To make meaningful use of their favourite morning sheet, they strove valiantly to acquire the faculty of reading.³³

Aditanar was of the view that 'news' was what the common man wanted to be informed about. And, he did it in a manner that suited the common man's taste, in the language he was familiar with and, the best thing about it was that he succeeded in a big way. He set his own standards, chose his own diction and made a success of everything he attempted, truly a genius among journalists and an achiever of rare merit.

It is as a journalist rather than as a writer that Aditanar is remembered today. However, three books authored by him stand out as masterpieces on the chosen subject. The first of these *Tamil Perarasu*, (The Tamil Kingdom) has also been clothed in the simple, conversational language of everyday use.³⁴ It speaks of an era spanning 600 years of glory which ended in the 14th century when first the Nayaks and then the Muslims enslaved Tamil Nadu. Even after the decline of the Muslim power, slavery under the British continued for a long time. The next 600 years would be a period of resurgence of the Tamil people, who would recapture former glory in a political climate of freedom and self-rule. This book could be taken as Aditanar's statement of policy and political objectives *vis-à-vis* Tamil Nadu and its people. It is masterly dissertation, a thoroughly comprehensive statement of intent by one who wanted Tamil Nadu to be a free, independent state.³⁵

What historians have failed to do because of timidity, Aditanar has accomplished with courage and conviction. Another book, very much in use even today is Aditanar's compilation of the rules and procedural proprieties concerning the conduct of business in the Legislative Assemblies of India. By rendering the English original into Tamil, Aditanar has done a great service to Tamil Nadu and its people.³⁶

The third book that he authored was *The Handbook for Aspiring Journalists*, an invaluable ready reckoner and source of reference to any one aspiring to be a newscaster or a reporter. It could, in its own way, stand comparison with the immortal *Thirukkural*, particularly in the Fourth Estate. It is the only book of its kind. No

such book has been written on the subject after Aditanar's guide made its appearance in 1965.³⁷

Aditanar's political ambitions transcended all short-term expediencies. He dreamed of an independent state of Tamil Nadu. He foresaw great possibilities in the event of the Sethusamudram scheme being implemented. Quite in tune with his nature, he named it 'Tamilian's Canal'. Now that efforts are on to see this project through, it could be said that one of Aditanar's dreams has come true.³⁸

Aditanar lived and died for Tamil and the Tamil people. His body, he was prepared to consign to the earth but his life and his soul belonged to Tamil. On the 24th day of May 1981, Aditanar breathed his last. Even after his body returned to earth whence it had sprung, his vaulting spirit merged with the Tamil, he lived and died for.³⁹ He has found a place in the history of Tamil Nadu. His fame shall endure as long as Tamil endures. He will inspire generations to come, may he live forever in grateful hearts!

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