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## INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE TAMIL WRITERS

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**ABSTRACT :** The writers reflect the people, the society, the movements, the land and what not. The popular movements, leaders and their activities are formed the themes or reflections of the writers in any society. This paper reveals how the Tamil writers capitalised the Indian struggle for freedom, the role of the Indian National Congress, leaders, its movements, the public consciousness since the last decade of the nineteenth century. One way or the other the writers recorded the Tamil society and its socio-political transformation.

**Keywords :** Indian struggle , Tamil society , socio-political transformation.

### INTRODUCTION :

Panaiappachetty's idea of feeding the knowledge through quotations had inspired the readers as well emulated the popular personalities.<sup>1</sup> In the novel *Manivannan*, the character Manivannan was asked whether he is joining the Congress and becoming a patriot? Manivannan replied that he wanted to serve the nation and to work for the people usefully by joining the Congress instead of just whiling away his time.<sup>2</sup> Kalki showed the difficulties faced by a congress worker in his novel *Magudapathy*. Sengodagoundan advised Magudapathy to return home as his absence would not be of any lose neither to Gandhi nor Congress in getting *Swaraj*.<sup>3</sup> *Swaraj* meant freedom to all the three hundred and fifty million Indians even the humblest in his own stand.<sup>4</sup> Manivannan replied to Velupillai in the novel *Manivannan*, *swaraj* did not mean to oust Britishers from India but, if we did not get independence it was impossible for us to eradicate poverty and remove the sorrow of the poor. And also he said that the British would lose nothing to British in getting our independence from them.<sup>5</sup> Doing national service was the duty of a citizen towards his motherland. Panaiappachetty in *Manivannan* asked the people to do the service for the sake of service without anticipating any rewards.<sup>6</sup>

Swadeshi Movement, an individual work of Bal Gangadhar Tilak according to Bharathi had a mass appeal.<sup>7</sup> Of course, it was the first movement after 1857 revolt which inspired the people towards the freedom struggle. Mass consciousness was started only after the 1920's movements. Collector Lord Vinch to V.O. Chidambarampillai in Bharathi's song, gave the message of Chidambarampillai's efforts in running the Swadeshi Steam Navigation and countering the British in expounding the necessity of *Swaraj*.<sup>8</sup> Sakunthala Bharathi commented that the words spoken by Arjuna in Bharathi's poem Panchali Sabatham were like expressing the conditions of the Swadeshis who were exiled in Pondicherry.<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi introduced a new style of love and *ahimsa* to uphold the march towards freedom. Bharathi was the first among the writers who assured the achievement of independence under Gandhi's leadership and movements. He had falcitated Gandhi as the one who came to redeem India.<sup>10</sup> Most of the songs of Namakkal Ramalingampillai kindled the feelings of the people to join with Gandhi and in the freedom struggle. Kalki

pictured the impact of the Gandhi in the hearts of his lovers. In a short story *Abalayin Kanneer* (tears of a destitute), Sivaraj could not tolerate the act of Devaraj who was smoking with his legs stretched upon the table in front of the portrait of Gandhi.<sup>11</sup> In the novel *Desabhakthan Kandhan* (Kandan the Patriot) the character of Kandhan reminds one of Gandhi. Nallan speaks truly, even if they could not act as he (Kandhan) advised, atleast they have to respect the leaders.<sup>12</sup> The character of Saradhamani in *Kalvanin Kathali* (the love of a thief) was the impact of Gandhian principle. In the *Vidyalaya* she gives handicraft training to all the students with the view to depending on themselves instead of on others as Mahatma Gandhi advised.<sup>13</sup> The qualities of Gandhi were used in the characters of the novels and short stories.

The massacre of Jallianwalabagh coincided with the cry of Bharathi, “as we have nurtured the plant of freedom with our tears, how will we allow it to perish.”<sup>14</sup> Venkataramani tried to picture the tragedy of Jallianwalabagh in his novel *Desabhakthan Kandhan*. Kandhan, Rajeswari and Rangan were organising a meeting in Tranquebar. The meeting place was surrounded by the sea in the East, fort in the South and big buildings in the West and the North. There were 16,000 people assembled from all over the district. Since the authorities wanted to check the public participation in the movements, permission was forbidden for the meeting. To disperse the crowd and to prevent the meeting the Deputy Collector ordered the people to disperse within two minutes. The only passage was blocked by the armed men. The Deputy Collector then, ordered his men to fire.<sup>15</sup> This tragedy resembled the Jallianwalabagh, Punjab though it was stated in the novel as non-cooperation movement. This clearly exhibited the atrocious nature of the British and the condition of the people.

The fast spreading of non-cooperation movement like wildfire was witnessed in the writings. while explaining the movement the author Venkataramani said that the people’s tuft was with the government whereas the body and the soul were in the freedom struggle.<sup>16</sup> Here, an appeal to the people had been made openly as well as informed the people’s participation to the government. Further the author characterised Rajeswari to sacrifice her life for the nation and the people. She asked Rangan to relinquish his government job and join the Congress to participate in the non-cooperation movement.<sup>17</sup> Rajeswari was introduced as a disciple of Gandhi and related to Dr. Anne Besant.<sup>18</sup> This introduction and her relation with the national movement, the leaders and relating to the country, Kalki repeated the call of Gandhi in his novel *Thiyaga Boomi* (the land of sacrifice). He guides the women to join the movement, “see the independence in the prison; get the freedom in chains. If you unfetter our mother country; your chains of slavery will be automatically broken.”<sup>19</sup> By this he deliberately asked the women to join the struggle. He also showed the participation of women in the struggle and witnessed their arrests.<sup>20</sup>

Ramalingampillai in his *Kilikkannigal* (Parrot’s cage) song expressed the principles of non-cooperation movement in the form of advice to a parrot. In this he teaches the way, to uphold the passive resistance to a parrot captive in a beautiful cage. If you cultivate the ideas of freedom you can get freed in a second.<sup>21</sup>

The British India Government was compared to a boat sailing towards the Bay of Bengal in the placid waters of the Adyar river, unaware of its impending doom.<sup>22</sup> Venkataramani represented the impact of the mass movement and the British unawareness of its consequences, in uprooting the British Government as a result of the mass participation in the struggle. Pudumaipithan criticised the man who did not take part in the non-cooperation and salt *satyagraha* movements.<sup>23</sup>

Panaipappachetty condemned the participation in the Assembly Elections as unwanted as it went against the Congress programmes. It was said that the ambition of getting a seat in the Assembly could only be a dream, and nothing could be achieved from

there. Kalyanasundaram, while speaking at the Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday meeting said that the obsessions to get a seat in the Assembly Election had been increasing day by day but love for *khaddar* had decreased.<sup>24</sup>

Novels also witnessed the lavish expenditure of the rich in the Assembly Elections. Venkararamani showed the rich landlords were spending their whole time and money for the elections.<sup>25</sup> The rich people were not only spending the money for elections but also to buy titles such as *Rao Bahadur* and *Diwan Bahadur* when the poor were starving for food. In *Shanmuganathan* of Panaiappachetty, Ponnusamythevar informed Shanmuganathan about his friend who had paid rupees three lakhs to get the title *Diwan Bahadur*.<sup>26</sup>

There was split in the Congress Party over the question of Assembly entry. This diverted the attention of the people. Kalyanasundaram in his speech asked the people to work for constructive programme and to work for freedom with unity instead of thinking about Assembly entry.<sup>27</sup> The question of Assembly entry started from the introduction of Dyarchy and the Congress directed to boycott the Assembly elections. This system worked in 1920's for a decade successfully. Instead of Congress, *Swarajist* contested in the elections, including the Madras Presidency. The novel which had been published in 1927, exhibited the nature and advised the other people to stay away from the elections.

In Kalvanin Kathali, the serious turn of civil disobedience movement was shown and most of the characters of the novel participated and were arrested. In this novel, *Panchanathanpillai* had interest in Congress Movement. But he backed away and escaped from the scene of protest when other people got arrested and imprisoned for their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>28</sup>

The second Civil Disobedience Movement and the struggle in the Coimbatore were taken as the central theme of the novel Magudapathy. In the first chapter, itself Magudapathy describe the failure of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the beginning of the struggle at Coimbatore on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1931.<sup>29</sup> The congress workers wanted to be more stubborn than in the previous 1926 movements.<sup>30</sup> At the same time the authorities were also making arrangements to nip the movement in the bud.<sup>31</sup> Six congress workers started a procession from the congress office to the Market and raised the slogan *Vande Mathram*. They were beaten up severely by the police but they resisted passively and did not run away. The public were indiscriminately beaten up.<sup>32</sup> Magudapathy replied to Senthiru that independence seemed to be near due to the seriousness of the 1930 Movement, but then that gone far away.<sup>33</sup> He gave importance to the achievements of independence than his marriage. Magudapathy did not participate in the Coimbatore *Satyagraha* because the leaders asked him to do *satyagraha* in Mettupalayam Taluk itself.<sup>34</sup>

In the short story, Nondi of Pudumaipithan, Ramanathan had lost his legs in a lathi charge as he participated in the boycott. He wore a *khaddhar* cap and *khaddhar* dress even in his old age.<sup>35</sup> This showed the firm belief in congress movements whereby identifying himself with *Khaddhar* dress. He was called by the author 'a lover who had lost his legs for independence. He loved a girl Manonmani who participated the boycott.'<sup>36</sup> But he could not marry her because he was disabled. He wanted a maid to serve him and not a wife for his life. The thirst of freedom was shown in the sacrificing love for his mother country. *Satyagraha* meant clinging to the truth, holding fast to truth insistence on truth or firm adherence to truth came what say.<sup>37</sup> Gandhi says, "I learnt the lesson of non-violence from my wife."<sup>38</sup> It is confined that human evolution is based on the law of love and non-violence. Gandhi advocated non-violence in the Indian struggle for freedom and with that he fought against the British. Nallan in *Thiyagabhommi* said that he would do *satyagraha* to prevent Sambhusatri leaving from the *Kuppam*<sup>39</sup> to participate in freedom struggle. But Sastri explained to him, '*satyagraha* has to be done only for good and sacred purpose not for any trivial cause as it is a very powerful weapon'.<sup>40</sup> The importance of the

*satyagraha* has its power to work in the march towards freedom was brought out. In the same novel Kalki explained that an old man starting on his freedom *yatra* supporting himself with a stick. In following this, the people of *Bharath* started similar marches by 1000, 16,000 and in lakh singing the song of Ramalingampillai, 'a war is there without weapons and without bloodshed, come and join all who believe in the perpetuity of the truth.'<sup>41</sup> This brings forth the Vedaranyam Salt march of Rajagopalachari.

Violent means were employed in Europe for freedom. Unlike we have to follow non-violence in achieving the freedom so as not to discolor our glorious past.<sup>42</sup> The extremist ways which were employed in Pre-Gandhian era were criticised as acts of sabotage. The extremists' movements existed and served for some time rigorously. This was condemned and discouraged. In a short story of *Thooku Thandanai* (Capital Punishment), Thirumalai said this to Sadagobaachariyar that 'anti-social acts like cutting of telegraph wires and removal of rails were not advocated by Gandhi.'<sup>43</sup> In the novel *Manivasagan* it is said that, brute force would not help. Our youth should possess faith, knowledge, sincerity and courage to rejuvenate the country.<sup>44</sup> In *Thiyagaboomi*, Sambusastri's sister Meena left with Ramachandraiyaer. He was the one who took active part in the Extremist Movement. Since he was closely watched by the police he escaped in *Parsi* dress and took Meena, without informing her brother. The people were informed that extremism was an unwanted as one had to always live in fear. It was explained that before Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, some gave foolish advice that it was necessary to use bombs to overthrow the British from India.<sup>45</sup> The choice of non-violence was stressed as an option to take up the march for freedom.

Ramalingam Pillai kindled the idea of *satyagraha* as the movement was fading and losing its appeal, in his poetry. "You have laboured through difficult times with body, soul and mind in employing *satyagraha* but why do you think of forsaking it when the fruit of your labour is at the hand."<sup>46</sup> He supported the people to participate actively in the *satyagraha* movement instead of backing when the result was nearer. Again, he asked 'O heart, I have undertaken to follow the path of *satyagraha* if you would aid me, one should surely attain the freedom'.<sup>47</sup> He had personified the people as the heart of Gandhi and the labour as independence. Gandhi called the *satyagraha* to uphold non-violence even if they were beaten up by the English. But Paniappachetty in his novel deviated from Gandhi's non-violence policy and advised the people to retaliate when they were assaulted and not to be idle.<sup>48</sup>

Kalki highlighted the spirit of a newly married couple for the country. Senthiru said to Bankajam as Magudapathy was courting arrest by participating in *satyagraha* immediately after their marriage.<sup>49</sup> Senthiru further said, she also wanted to do *satyagraha* but she had to look after her ailing father-in-law who was the cause of many trouble given to them.<sup>50</sup> The quality of pity over their enemy was shown, Pudumaipithan in his short story *Kattil Pesukiradhu* (the cot is talking) exhorted the interest of a small boy and his stubborn mind to do *satyagraha*. But he did not get bullet injuries though he was beaten up to death.<sup>51</sup> Sacrificing the lives of the motherland had been advocated so that the future generation at least could live freely. There were selfish people who tried to exploit the struggle. Bharathi asked when independence which was dearer eye sight was lost how you could work under the British for a living. And he compared giving up of independence for pleasure like buying a beautiful painting by selling one's eyes.<sup>52</sup> He was surprised to see the people think about anything else when they had set their mind to attain freedom. People talked about nationalism do not even think about it in their dreams.<sup>53</sup> This was the comment of the mind of the people who were accustomed to the way of life under British regime. Britishers employed the influential people locally as mediators between the natives and the British. In turn, the influential people acted truly for British by exploiting their own native people.



People from all walks of life with different principles and ideas were brought together by the nationalist movement.<sup>54</sup> This was shown in the novel of *Desabhakthan Kandan*. Mostly the rich and the wealthy landlords were supporting the Government for their selfish interest Pudumaipittan explained in *Vazhakai* (life) 'in the society of a big fish could eat a small fish. But if a small fish ate a still smaller one, then this was treated by the society as a crime and was punished.'<sup>55</sup>

The rich people like Panniar (landlord) deem to court to arrest then there would be no stopping of the freedom March. The Deputy Collector suggested this to the Collector in the novel *Desabahakthan Kandan*.<sup>56</sup> The disinterest of the landlords was criticised and their participation in the movement was urged. Guruswamy Sharma showed when nobody in society had so much patriotism why should not the rest of the people also get this spirit of patriotism. He appealed to dormant patriotism of the rich and well- to-do class and exhorted them to join the freedom struggle, jealousy was the cause for a third person to topple and to rule over us. In his novel *Premakalavadhyam*, Breman a small boy cried why did he give an orphan so much patriotism,<sup>57</sup> than giving it to somebody who was happy and better off in the society. Ramalingampillai criticised how could we Indians gain independence when we love money and working to exploit the unfortunate.<sup>58</sup> Nero said to be play fiddle when Rome was burning, many people court positions in the Government instead of serving the country. Rich people, Panaippachetty identified, as selfish and aspired for vein glory in posing as nationalists.<sup>59</sup>

Almost all the programmes of the Indian national movement had an impact on the Tamil writers. But no writer had touched upon all the programmes. Only the movements which were more oriented had an impact on the writers. In the prose writings, these messages were employed as social reflections. The poems kindled the Tamil people to look for independence as well to join with Gandhi in Congress to war against the British. From the novels *Magudapathi*, *Desabahkthan Kandan* and a chapter in *Gandhimathi* one could see the open call to join in the movement for independence. Gandhi and his leadership of Congress received much attention in contemporary Tamil writings of that period than any other national leaders.

These writings propagated the Congress programmes such as Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and Salt *Satyagraha*. It helped the readers and through them the common people to understand the programmes not only from the press but also in these entertaining literatures. There was moral teaching intended to work for the nation. There instigated a sense of sacrifice to free the motherland when one was under the sway of the Britishers. The importance of non-violence was emphasised. The extremist movement was condemned. An open call had arisen to work with Gandhi instead of thinking in extremism. The writers kindled the readers to participate part in the freedom struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> Panaiappachetty, S., *Gandhimathi*, Madras, 1927.p.1

<sup>2</sup> Panaiappachetty, S., *Manivannan*, Madras, 1928.p.4

<sup>3</sup> Kalki.R. Krishnamurthy, *Magudapathy*, Madras, 1982, pp.120-121

<sup>4</sup> R. Dhandayudam, *Samoga Novelgal*, Madras, 1979, pp.130-137

<sup>5</sup> Panaiappachetty, S., *Manivannan*, p.5

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> C. Subramanya Bharathi, *Desiya Geethangal*, Madras, 1955, p.57

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.59-60

<sup>9</sup> Sakunthala Bharathi, *En Thanthai*, Calcutta, 1974, p.20

<sup>10</sup> C. Subramanya Bharathi, *Desiya Geethangal*, p.65

<sup>11</sup> Kalki, *Abalayin Kanneer*, *Kalki*, April 27, 1942, p.14

<sup>12</sup> K.S. Venkataramani, *Desabhakthan Kandhan* , Madras, 1942,p.10

- 13 Kalki, *Kalvanin Kathali*, Madras, 1985, p.132
- 14 C. Jagathratchagan, *Bharathiyum Bharathidasanum*, Madras, 1982, p.58
- 15 K.S. Venkataramani, *Desabhakthan Kandhan* , pp.177-179
- 16 *Ibid*
- 17 T.V. Veerasamy, *Tamil Novel Vagaihal*, Madras, 1979, pp.232-233
- 18 K.S. Venkataramani, *Desabhakthan Kandhan* , pp.11
- 19 Kalki, *Thiyaga Boomi*, Madras, 1968, p.335
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 K. Ramalingampillai, *Prarthanai*, Madras, 1940, p.14
- 22 T.V. Veerasamy, *Tamil Novel Vagaihal*, pp.232
- 23 V. M. Pothiyavarpan, *Pudumaipithan Kathaikal*, Palayamkottai, 1976, p.37
- 24 Panaiappachetty, S., Gandhimathi, p.220
- 25 K.S. Venkataramani, *Desabhakthan Kandhan* , pp.220
- 26 S. Panaiappachetty, *Shanmuganathan alladhu Dhanavaishyaminor*, Madras, 1927, p.43
- 27 Panaiappachetty, S., Gandhimathi, pp.220 - 221
- 28 Kalki, *Kalvanin Kathali*, p.93
- 29 Kalki, Nagudapathy, P.2
- 30 *Ibid.*, P.3
- 31 *Ibid.*, P.4
- 32 *Ibid.*,
- 33 *Ibid.*, P.28.
- 34 *Ibid.*, P.12.
- 35 Pudumaipithan, Puthiya Oli, Madurai, 1953, pp.70-71
- 36 *Ibid.*, p.72
- 37 R. R. Diwakar, *Saga of Satyagraha*, Bombay, 1969
- 38 *Ibid.*, p.13
- 39 *Kuppam* is nothing but a place where fisherfolk or working-class people live. The habitat near the sea shore is also known as *Kuppam*.
- 40 Kalki, *Thiyagaboomi*, p.234
- 41 *Ibid.*, p.229
- 42 V. Ramalingapillai, Sangoli, p.15
- 43 Kalki, Thooku Tandana, *Kalki*, March 20, 1943, pp.19-20
- 44 S. Panaiappachetty, Manivasagan, p.176
- 45 Kalki, *Thiyagaboomi*, p.328
- 46 V. Ramalingapillai, Sangoli, pp.19-20
- 47 *Ibid.*, p.20
- 48 S. Paniappa Chetty, Gandhimathi, PP.221
- 49 Kalki, Nagudapathy, P.130
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.20
- 51 Pudumaipithan, Katil Pesugiradhu, p.32
- 52 C. Subramanya Bharathi, Swadesha Geetha Sangeetham, Madras, n.d., p.20
- 53 C. Subramanya Bharathi, Swadesha *Geethangal*, Part I, Madras, 1925, pp.67-69
- 53 T.V. Veerasamy, *Tamil Novel Vagaikal*, pp.234-235
- 54 Pudumaipithan, *Pudumaipithan Kathigal*, Madras, 1977, p.135
- 55 K.S. Venkataramani, p.146
- 56 *Ibid.*,
- 57 S.V. Gurusamy Sharma, pp.193-94
- 58 V. Ramalingampillai, Sangoli, p.17
- 59 T.V. Veerasamy, *Tamilil Samugal Novelgal*, Madras, 1978