

## Origin and Progression of Social Movements and Their Manifestation in the History of Tamil Periodicals

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### Abstract

Around the world, scholarly study of the history of Journalism has gained momentum. Many research institutions promote their scholars to carry out studies on the effect of institutional, social, political, economic and cultural lineage of Journalism from its genesis. Amidst many narrative structures, Textual narrations that appeared in the periodicals have redefined the history of several countries. The pre-independence epoch social history of Tamil periodicals has an enormous impetus to excavate the socio-political history of Tamil Nadu and India as well. The existing chronological history of Tamil Journalism offers basic information on the timeliness of this regional distribution of news and information. Especially, pre-independence periodicals have played a crucial role in reconstructing social organization and the way Indian independence was achieved. To materialize the objective of the study the researcher envisioned to trace the social history of pre-independence Tamil periodicals by employing a Historical Research Approach as a research method. The study ascertains the affiliation between the origin and sustenance of social movements and the social history of Tamil periodicals.

**Keywords:** Tamil, Journalism, Social History, Social Movements, Periodicals.

### Introduction

History is not the anthology of the order of events; rather it is the manifestation of the day-to-day activities of human life. Mass Media is a powerful tool to unearth the socio, cultural, political and biological rudiments of people of ancient times. Mass media has been a reliable and trustworthy treasure of archives in preserving the events of the past. Media contents have been the primary and important resource of information for studying and investigating history. The social history of any country is known only through the media that existed from its primitive stages of a country's growth. The history of Indian mass media is less than three hundred years old. This history is found only in chronological order and it did not accumulate the social background, cultural, political development of India. Thus, there is a need to investigate the historical background of periodicals in the light of Journalism in India.

Books and journals are the yardsticks of measuring human growth and social development in a society. Media is the horologe to apprehend the overall dimension of the

people of a particular epoch. Media is the vital source of information for the researchers to comprehend the periodical changes that took place in the due course of time. Media reflects the socio-economic and cultural changes that shape the society from time to time. Thus, if one attempts to study the media of a particular time, one can entirely understand the people of that time, their characteristics and their living conditions.

The Famous Historians Joseph, Brian and Janda Richard (2003) elucidate the term *history* as an 'inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation'. History is the analysis and interpretation of the human past that enables us to study the continuity and change over time. It is an act of both investigation and imagination that seeks to explain how people have changed over time. The historian Peter N. Stearns (1998) codified the benefit of studying history and ascertains that 'History helps us to understand people and societies; History helps us to understand change and how the society we live in came to be'.

The history of media ought to be viewed based on the aforesaid descriptions. The study of media history is a very fundamental part of the history. Without an understanding of the past, the present era doesn't make much sense. The study of media history also gives us an understanding of our identity. As mentioned earlier media history is also crucial in examining identity. The research paper on *Why study media history* (1998) enlightens us: 'Journalism is important to historians because it can give us a window on to the past. It can tell us what people were thinking and saying at various important times in the past. It is for this reason that Journalism is sometimes called the 'first draft of history'.

### **Review of Research and Development in the Subject**

The historical research in Journalism is not so visible in the academic arena. The researcher Karmen Erjavec (2008) has reiterated the status of historical research in the media realm.

*How to study the history of Journalism* research paper states that 'In Slovenia, as in other Eastern and Western European countries and the USA, the study of the history of Journalism remains more or less insignificant. For example, a course called 'History of Journalism' is one of the least popular topics in the curriculum offered by the only Department for Journalism in Slovenia University. Furthermore, only a small number of research projects were carried out (the last one was finished in the 1980s), and only a few books were written on this theme'. Further, he explains the reason for the lack of research in the field of history of Journalism. He argues that 'the reasons are very diverse and various. One of them is that citizens' interests and responses to all history, not just the history of Journalism, have been in decline. In particular, because of our post-socialist condition, there is a common belief that history, in general, is socially unproductive and that we all must look toward the future only. On the other side, there is a huge interest in interpreting the history of Journalism and history in general by right-wing politicians, media and journalists. Almost every day we see how these politicians try to re-interpret history (especially, Second World War and socialism history) and use it for their own current political goals'.

Another scholar added new dimensions to the subject. According to Researcher Carey (2007), “Journalists generally do not know much about the history of their craft. Thus, we have a particular type of a paradox here: on one side, there is little interest in the history of Journalism (education and research) by students and scholars. On the other hand, there is a huge interest in the use of the history of Journalism (political practice) by some politicians and journalists.”

But the researcher Alt wood’s (1978) views are different from other scholars. In his research he articulates that “The reasons for this contradictory interest in the history of Journalism are various. One of them is a lack of critical reflection on the dimension and direction of Journalism historiography and a historical and uncritical practice by Journalism historians themselves.”

There are many ways to go about writing media history. The most common approach in the Nordic countries as elsewhere is to trace the histories of media organizations, whether individual Newspapers or radio and television companies. This approach is often referred to as 'institutional histories' (Bondebjerg, 2002). Media historians often shift their focus on the social history of the Journalism. Michael Schudson’s (1978) *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (1978) and Scannell and Cardiff (1991) *Social history of British broadcasting* are important in the arena of Journalism history. More interestingly, researchers advocate the cultural approach of Journalism history, as it was one method to study the communication of a society. Instead of studying one particular form of mass communications, Journalism historians should examine the passageway of the media through society.

Although Carey's challenge began the movement towards a cultural approach in Journalism history, he was not the first to advocate it. Sidney Kobre (1945) first advanced the notion of studying the *relationships between the Newspaper and society* in 1945 and expanded on that idea in 1969. The problem with the study of media history is that “media history tends not to illuminate the links between media development and wider trends in society because it is often narrowly focused on the content or organization of the media' and the reason for this is that it is preoccupied with 'institutional development” (Curran, 2002).

### **Method of Study**

The study on the social history of pre-independence periodicals has been carried out in an in-depth way to understand the relationship between the genesis of social movements and the origin of the periodicals. In this study, the researcher employs a Historical Research Approach to study the correlation between the genesis of Social Movements and the origin of Tamil periodicals in Tamil Nadu.

### **Genesis and Progress of Social Movements in Tamil Nadu**

Indian society has been identified as a caste-based society for centuries. Though there were changes in social structure during the reigns of various rulers, there was some transformation in the practice of caste system in India. It can be traced in the olden period of

Tamil Nadu that the people structured their lifestyle based on their profession. Many researchers have time and again pointed out the fact that no single profession has been carried out by the same generation in society. Many traditions coexisted in India such as the Sangam stage, Vedic period, Shaivism era, Vaishanava era, and then the Buddhism and Jainism. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Jainism and Buddhism were suppressed by Shaivism and Vaishnavam, Siddhars emerged and they sermonized and fought against those practices. Even though religious movements were dominant during these times, the doctrine and ideologies of Siddhars were found in them.

Though the *Advaita Vedanta* of AdiShankara, *VishishtAdvaita* of Ramanuja, *Advaita Vedanta* of Madhavacharya were identified as notable philosophies of Hinduism, they were also growing as individual movements. Among them, Ramanujar (1017-1137) focused on social reformation and with the contribution of spreading Vaishnavism. He called the people belonging to the low caste as *Thirukullathar*. Following this initiative, to bring reform in *Vaishnavism*, and make it into a people's movement an attempt was by Mahatma Gandhi who called the subaltern people as *Harijans*.

Arunan (2004) in his research pointed out the fact that caste practice was followed even by the Christian missionaries who came to Madras in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Protestant priests have accepted the caste system and they also agreed to the system of having separate seating for the low and high caste people. But there was no distinction shown while giving Holy Communion to the people belonging to both castes.

But the Christian religious movements after the 1850s started to change their standpoint on the caste system. The South India Missionary Conference held in 1858 raised the need for fighting against the caste system and they determined to voice against the caste system. Further Arunan also points out that the social renaissance movements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were religion centric. Vaikundha Samy and Ramalinga Adigal were known for their religious reforms in Hinduism.

Brahma Samaj and Theosophical Society were examples of bringing about a reformation in Hinduism and they fought for the rights of the people belonging to the subaltern sphere. Temple entry movements are examples of such initiatives. In the same manner, social activists like Ayothidasa Pandithar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan wanted to make use of British government for social reformation. One part of the Indian freedom movement was the social reform movements initiated by various leaders.

Ayothidasa Pandithar occupies a significant position in the field of social reformation. He fought against the caste system widely prevalent in Indian society and voiced for the basic education of the downtrodden people. Some of the fundamental requirements for the eradication of caste systems such as inter-caste marriage, education, reservation in government sectors and land reforms were not the agendas of the leaders fought for the social reforms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was only the initial period for propagating social issues. The study of Tamil history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century throws light on the untouchability and Varna system which were deep-rooted in the history of Tamils. Social issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, education to women and freedom to women were still not reached by the people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Discrimination was deep-rooted among all the segments of the society in the name of untouchability and caste system.

The Indian Slavery Act, 1843, was an act passed in British India under East India Company rule, which outlawed many economical transactions associated with slavery and the enactment of Indian Penal Code, 1860 became the protectors of people's rights. These laws paved the way for the way of freedom, but still, they failed to bring about drastic social change in society. The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed various segments of issues. The growth of the caste system into various forms, and sub-castes, male chauvinism, British imperialism, capitalism, conversion by Christian missionaries, etc.

The common schooling system didn't find its place at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Education was confined to only Brahmins, Vaishyas, and Kshatriyas and the teachers were also from the same community. It is the Christian missionaries who brought about the changes in the education system. Even though the motto of the Christian missionaries was conversion, one can notice that they provided modern European education to all segments of society in India.

It is observed that after 1830, social transformation movements started to be established everywhere. Studies have shown that the *Hindu Literacy Society* was started in 1830 keeping in mind to bring social reformation by taking over the advantage of British education expertise and its ruling in India. After this, *Chaturvedi Sidhananada Sabha* was started to protest against the spread of Christianity. The first organization in the Madras Presidency to vent for the rights of Indians was the *Madras Native Association* which was established by Gazulu. In 1852 the *Hindu Progressing Improvement Association* and *Hindu Debating Society* were started. In 1873, the *Hindu Widow Remarriage Association* was established in Nagercoil. To engage political and societal problems *Sudandara Indian Association* was started.

In 1864 *Triplicane Native Library Society* was started, and then in 1874 it was renamed as *Triplicane Victory Society*. In 1857 *Adi Dravida Mahajan Sabha* was established to voice the issues of Adi Dravidar and in the same manner, *Panchamar Maha Sabha* was also created. Though many social reforms movements emerged from 1830 to 1874, they failed to take their principles to the people, says Mani (2009), Tamil periodical researcher. Therefore, until 1874, no periodicals were propagating the ideologies of social movements.

It was only during the second phase of Tamil periodicals from 1882 to 1941 that several periodicals from different ideological movements came into existence. *Hindu Free Thought Union Movement*(1882), *Knowledge Propagation Sabha*(1833), *The Hindu Religion Hindu Track Society* (1887), *South India Tamil Association* (1890), *Hindu Social Reform*

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*Association* (1892), *Dravida Bhasha Association* (1909), *Chennai Dravida Pathrika Sabha* (1885), *The Madras Non-Brahmin Association* (1909), *Madras Dravidian Association* (1912), and *South Indian Liberal Federation* (1916) were some of the social movements which predominantly engages the socio political activities in Tamil Nadu. Following this trend, *South Indian Welfare Association*, *Justice Party*, *Dravidian parties* were established. These political and social movements brought out many Newspapers and periodicals to disseminate their ideologies to the mass.

### **Reflection of the Ideology of the Social Movement in the History of Tamil Journalism**

Tamil Nadu is the only place in India where many movements were started based on social reformative philosophies. These movements envisioned to propagate their ideologies to the people by utilizing the artistic approach of drama, music and print publications. Particularly periodicals were fairly used for their propagation. In India, public schools were started during the British era only after 1835. During this period, across Tamil Nadu, there were *Christian organizations*, *Vaikuntasaami Association* in the South, *Brahma Samaj* in the North, *ArutPrakasaVallalar Ramalinga Adigalar Samarasa Vedantha Sanmarga Sangam* (1865), among others, were actively engaged in reformist activities in Tamil Nadu. During these times, only the upper-class people received education in religions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. During this period *Thathuva Visarini* (1878), *Sathiyabhimani* (1880), *Thathuva Vivesini* (1882), *Sathiyabhimaani* (1882), *Sathiyavedakodi* (1882), *Muslim Nation* (1882), *Arya Janapriyan* (1882), *Brahmo Public Opinion* (1882), *Naalayira Dhivya Prabhandham* (1882), *Dinodhaya Varthamani* (1882), *Bhagawat Vishayam* (1883), *Kadavul* (1883), *Hindu Matha Seerthiruthi* (1883), *Arya Prakashini* (1884), *Hindu Saasanam* (1884), *Shaivabhimani* (1884), *Dravida Varthamani* (1884), *Hindu Janapoosini* (1884), *Dravida Mithran* (1885), *Siddhantha Rathnaakara Archadheepam* (1885), *Vinodha Manohari* (1885), *Swadeshabhimani* (1885), *VidyaVinodhini* (1885), *Brahma Vidya* (1886) were some of the notable periodicals which received the attention of the people. These periodicals wanted to take their Shaiva, Vaishnava, Brahma Gnana, Islamic, Christian ideologies to people, specifically to counter the claims made against their religions. We see that though Christian periodicals were the first to emerge, others too were quick enough to plunge into the field to propagate or put forth their ideas.

After the conceptualization of religions in Tamil society, the ideologies that emerged transformed into one that talked about development for oppressed people. *Advaita Sabhai* (1870), *Parayar Mahajana Sabha* (1892), *Dravida Pandiyan Sangam* (1885), *Parayar Mahajana Sangam* (1892), *Poorva Tamil Abhimana Sangam*, *Madras SamugaSevai League* were some of the organizations that worked for the liberation of oppressed people. In this backdrop, around 42 periodicals including *Suryodhayam*, *Panchaman*, *Maha Vikata Thoodhan*, *Oru Paisa Tamilan*, *Parayan* were vociferously circulated and these registered the voices of the oppressed and fought for their rights.

The presence of people predominantly from Brahmin caste was high in British government jobs and Congress party. Taking note of the meagre number of non-brahmins in the government jobs, those from the communities strove to claim their rights. To add to this,

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*Chennai Dravida Pathrika Sabai* (1885), *Hindu Darala Sindhanaiaalar Sangam* (1875), *Non-Brahmin Sangam* (1909), *Madras United League* came into existence. Later this organization in 1913 was renamed *Dravidar Sangam* to denote non-brahmins. *South Indian Welfare Association* that was started in the year 1916 by T. M. Nayar and Thiyagarayar was called *Neethi Katchi* (Justice Party) and later *Neethikatchi* became *Dravidar Kazhagam*. Contents of these periodicals were based on a common thread called *Dravidian* and strived to take the idea to people. Compared to other states, Tamil Nadu witnessed the emergence of several associations that wanted to bring in social reforms. It is found that these Dravidian periodicals functioned as a tool to propagate the ideas of these associations.

All these periodicals in the name of propagating the ideologies and principles were following the tactics of Journalism in taking the message to the people. Periodicals that were propagating their movement's ideologies have started to speak for social reformative issues to the people. It can be observed from the history of Tamil periodicals that Dravidian movement periodicals which were completely based on their principles have started attracting more attention to the people in Tamil Nadu. The history of Tamil periodicals observes that since 1916 when Dravidian movements started to until now, there are about 300 periodicals published. Dravidian periodicals stressed the principles such as Dravidian country is only for Dravidian, that is, they should be either anti-Brahmanism or anti-God. In addition to that, there was also promulgation about rationality, self-respect, equality in these periodicals. Thanthai Periyar started a periodical named *Kudiyarasu* on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1925 keeping the basic principles such as eradication of superstitious belief, promotion of atheism, annihilation of caste, women liberation, social justice and equality. Despite various laws, repressions, confiscation, imprisonment, penalties, and lawsuits that have followed in publishing his periodicals, Periyar never lost hope and he continued to run the periodicals. *Kudi Arasu*, *Revolt*, *Pagutharivu*, *Viduthalai*, *Justice*, *Unmai*, *Thinker* and *the Modern Rationalist* were few other publications that was flag shipped by Periyar.

After Periyar began to attract a large number of readers to his principles and ideologies, his descendants were running many periodicals. *Kuthoosi*, *Arivu Paathai*, *Arivu Kodi*, *Kilarchi*, *Ina Muzhakkum*, *Murasoli*, *Ina Murasu*, *Erottu Padhai*, *Mandram*, *Tamil Mandram*, *Thambi*, *Thozhan*, *Thennadu*, *Kaanji*, *Thaniyarasu*, *Pudhuvai Murasu*, *Puthu Ulagam*, *Naraga Thoothan*, *Ponni*, *Marumannam*, *Maravan Madal*, *Velli Veethi*, *Maalai Mani*, *Vetri Murasu*, *Kuralneri*, *Munnnetram*, *Munnani*, *Mullaisaram*, *Poorvaal*. *Muppaal*, *Oli*, *ThaniNaadu*, *Thaaiman*, *Sandamaarutham*, *Samadharmam*, *Kolgai Murasu*, and *Suya Mariyadhai* were some of the titles of periodicals which widely received the attention of the readers.

The impact of social movements found in the history of Tamils periodicals particularly by Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu is very significant. If one has to analyse the movements and the contents of Tamil periodicals originated in Tamil Nadu, it can be found that they didn't have any commercial motive behind it and they concentrated only on the contents of the periodicals. The richness of the content, relevant information, social awareness, and propaganda were the crux of all the periodicals that were started by the early

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social movements in Tamil Nadu. The content of the Dravidian movement periodicals and its journalistic strategies followed by it always throws surprises. The way the contents were organized such as the writing style, form of satire, literary form and the dialogue form receives appreciation. The principles and ideologies of the movements were discussed through the periodicals. The origins of all the periodicals were only centred on the motivation for which they stood for. Periodicals were published in support of freedom movements, eradication of caste system, anti-conversion, widows' remarriage, atheism and the growth of education, etc.

The periodical *Kudi Arasu* published in 1925 throws light that periodicals were started to take the principles and ideologies to the common man. This periodical proclaims that our country should excel in all fields like politics, economy, sociology, and ethics. 'We will strive hard for the physical, intellectual, art and language excellence of the people of our country. This periodical does not promote the development of a particular segment of people in the country, instead, all the people should be filled with steadfast love and self-respect and equality should always be high in the society' (*Kudi Arasu*, 1925).

The periodical *Pagutharrivu* follows suit. It records the following statement as the motto for publishing the periodical. "The periodical *Pagutharrivu* will try to propagate the scientific principles among the people. It will explain in detail about the science and technological developments. Furthermore, it will also explain the rare invention of scientists from other western countries. This periodical is out and out against the superstitious beliefs and will bring into light the fraudulent acts of priests. Practice and promotion of the caste system should be eliminated, and our periodical will fight for it". In brief, *Pagutharrivu* periodical was against anything that is beyond comprehension and it finds pleasure in serving the Tamil people by imparting knowledge and information. Thus, most of the periodicals published in the earlier period aimed at bestowing political and social reformative ideologies to the people.

## Conclusion

History of Journalism has always reflected the art, culture, social belief, ideology, beliefs among various other aspects of contemporary human society. But, outlook of periodicals is judged only based on the contents and functions of the periodical. The research has approached development in historic point of view and studied the social reasons for outlook of periodicals that has always reacted in favour or against the changes happening in the society. We can understand that Tamil society has seen various ideological battles in favour of and against religion, Vedas, British rule, northern language/s among other issues as nowhere in other parts of the country. This social movement has created impact on social, cultural, political and economic fields including arts (movies, dramas, etc.) and fine arts. *Social History of Pre-Independence Tamil Periodicals* study says that this battle has also been reflected on the history of Tamil Journalism. A periodical brought out those days has expressed development, outlook, and upheaval among others of social movements. We can notice that because of these periodicals, these movements and its ideas were taken to a wider audience.

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History of Tamil Journalism cannot just be seen in isolation, but the Tamil periodicals of those early days can be seen as evidence of social movements that were created due to developmental hierarchies that existed. Periodicals existed for various reasons such as for propagating ideologies, spreading knowledge among people, creating awareness on social issues, fighting for the rights of people among others. We can see that the art of Journalism was used only for the welfare of the nation, society, restoration of rights among others.

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