INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS

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Inaugural Address

By

Hon'ble Thiru Dr. KALAIGNAR
M. KARUNANIDHI
Chief Minister of Tamilnadu

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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57th Session of The Indian History Congress,

University of Madras, 27th December, 1996.

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Professor P.K. Ponnusamy, Vice-Chancellor, University of Madras, Professor H.K. Barpujari, President Indian History Congress, Professor V.N. Dutta, President-elect, Professor R.S. Sharma, Vice President, Professor Amales Tripathi, Distinguished Historians, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government of Tamilnadu and on my behalf, I cordially welcome the delegates of the Indian History Congress - the oldest academic body of India, to the 57th session at University of Madras, in Chennai, one of the pioneering Universities of India.

The Department of Indian History was created in 1914 as the first academic faculty of the University of Madras. It is true that the magnificent role played by the eminent historians and the scholars of this department in their writing and research of the Tamils and of the South Indian History led to a remarkable change in the whole concept of the understanding of the History of India.

Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Aiyengar's, **Augustan age of Tamil Literature**, *and* **Beginning of South Indian History;**

P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar's **The History of the Tamils,** *and* **The Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture;**

Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's **Pandiyan Kingdom** *and* **The Cholas;**

Dr. K K Pillai's **South India and Ceylone,** *and* **Social History of the Tamils**

are some of the earliest intellectual provocations which have launched a challenge to the then accepted concept that the Indian History was nothing but the history of North Indian orientation. These scholarly works and the successive researches have definitely established the Pre-Aryan history of India.

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Here I quote some of the findings of P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar in his **Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture:**

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"There are three lines of evidence which can be utilised for constructing a picture of the life of the Ancient Tamils.

The first source of information regarding ancient South Indian life is the catalogue of pre–historic antiquities of artefacts, the relics and the graveyards belonging to the Neolithic and early Iron ages.

The second line of evidence is the Pre-Aryan Tamil nouns and verbs, for they infer what objects they handle or had observed and what actions they were able to perform.

The third line of evidence is the early literature. The existing specimens of literature, no doubt belong to times later than the times of other two evidences. But, since the life of the people mirrored in their literature is an unbroken continuation of that of the earlier epoch and can be used

to confirm the conclusions reached by the other two lines of evidence".

By utilising these sources of information P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar proposes the culture of the Tamils to five thousand years ago - and calls it **'Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture'.**

The Tamils have some distinct characteristics in their understanding of the philosophy and the way of life. For example, the ancient political thinkers of the North tried to explain the **State of Nature** in the process of human life with the concepts of **Vanalatha or Kalpavriksha.** The ancient Tamils noted the surface of the habitable portions of the earth could be divided into five natural regions of **Palai, Kurinji, Mullai, Marudam** and **Neydal.** The most interesting aspect of this classification is that these are not only a mere geographical divisions but more to characterise the civilisational growth of the humanity. In **Palai,** the sandy desert land, grew the nomad stage; in **Kurinji** the mountainous country, the hunter stage; in **Mullai** the forest tracts, the Pastoral stage; in **Marudam,** the lower river valley, the agricultural stage and in **Neydal,** the littoral stage, the fishing and sailing stage of human development.

This Tamil society in the later centuries had to respond to the first great challenge of socio-cultural in character from the north.

The genius of Tamils according to P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar is marked by the scientific temperament, concrete ideas and images appealed to the Tamil people and hence Tamil is

peculiarly fitted to be the vehicles of scientific knowledge. The genius of Sanskrit is marked by the philosophical temperament; it revels in abstractions which are the life-breath of philosophy.

In the recent past the genius of the West have begun to influence/challenge the Indian Society.

'The challenges posed by the West are politically the concept of the Rule of Law, the knowledge of (Modern) Democracy and the organised Bureaucracy; economically the regularised Agrarian reforms, industrial economy and organ-ised labour and development of transport and communica-tions; socially the egalitarian ideas, civil rights and equal opportunity of education for all and religiously Christian ideologies of 'Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man' and the missionary activities coupled with humanism'.

'The Indian society which was politically despotic, eco-nomically feudal, socially casteist and religiously Brahminical began to respond these characteristic challenges of the west gradually from the dawn of the 19th century'.

It is to be admitted that, of all Indian regions, the earliest response was from Bengal. This ideological response of Bengal oriented Social Reform Movement was powerfully organised by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the form of Brahmo Samaj.

But during the last two decades of 19th Century and the first decade of the 20th Century a great change had manifested in the spirit of the majority of Indians. This was mainly due to three developments.

1. The suspicion on the activities of the Government for proselytization.

2. The greater caution and extreme reluctance of the British Government to promote Social Reforms.

3. The emergence of Religious movements to revive India from the so called De–Spiritualisation and De-Nationalisation.

These circumstances led a majority of the Hindu youth to defend and glorify all that was Hindu. Hence the efforts of the early social reformers were largely nullified.

As a contrast to this general trend of India, a new atmosphere began to develop from the 1910's in the Madras Presidency particularly in the Tamil speaking area. A great breakthrough in the history of Social Reform Movement in India emerged when Periyar (E V Ramasamy) broke with the Indian National Congress in 1925. He launched the Self Respect Movement with a view to bringing about new approach in the eradication of the two great evils of Indian society - the Casteism and the degradation of women. It was against almost all the traditional institutions which stand against the self respect of a person. Generally speaking, not only the intelligentsia but even the Press in Madras Presidency was divided as those which are interested in social issues and other predominantly political in their objectives.

One can see this findings of Sankaran Nair, runs strongly in the approach of the Justice Party and the Self Respect Movement towards the British.

From the facts given above a few observations and suggestions, I wish to submit to this August body of renowned historians and young scholars.

The History of Tamil Nadu is not merely a study of a Province or a State of India. It forms the nucleus for the history of South India. As such it is the study of one of the two great basic units which formed the basis to make the comprehensive Indian Society and Culture.

Secondly, the history of the Tamils is more than that of the History of India. One can positively infer that it is the Pan-Tamil Culture. The spread of Tamil culture in South and South East Asia has a glorious past and permanent hi for the Tamils as an International Race. Though, Western Scholars have captioned it as 'Greater India', if one studies the emigration patterns from India it is largely the Tamils who went across the World and made the new lands as their native country. The 'Greater India' concept is evolved mainly because of the spread of the Tamil Race.

Hence one looks forward to more research works on the history of Tamils on these new dimensions rather than narrowing it to a history of a Province of India. In the recent years, a number of foreign historians have done a great deal of research and contributed a variety of knowledge to the understanding of the Tamils and the Tamil Culture than the Non-Tamil Indian Historians. My sincere appeal to the galaxy of scholars assembled here is that the Indian historians from other parts of the Country should also come forward to contribute to the study of the Tamils, of course, without prejudice.

By these observations my aim is not to promote any kind of linguistic parochialism or racial fanaticism. But only to drive home a few facts that;

Firstly, the Tamil society is not merely a Provincial one but an international factor.

Secondly, the Tamils have a glorious past and socio-cultural character basically different, unique and classical.

Thirdly, the Tamils as the basic Indian Society have contributed differently and significantly to the evolution of the Indian culture.

And these realities regarding the history of the Tamils, I submit, should be recognised honestly by any unprejudiced historian on India and that will go a long way to make true, comprehensive and better history of Indian people.

With this, I thank the members of the Executive Committee of the Indian History Congress and the Local Committee for inviting me to inaugurate this historic session at Chennai.

I declare the 57th session of the Indian History Congress open.

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தி.மு.க. அறக்கட்டளை
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