

K. Anbazhagan: From Periyar to Udhayanidi



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Anna's assessment had not proved wrong. About the two comrade students, who invited him to deliver a speech at Annamalai University, he had thought otherwise in the interregnum. In his customary letter to his younger brothers in 1955, Anna wrote as follows: "It was only in Annamalai University that I saw Nedunchezhian... At that time, comrade Anbazhagan was actively pursuing party work. Comrade Nedunchezhian appeared to be focusing on himself and his studies alone. Then I thought that while comrade Anbazhagan would join the Kazhagam, comrade Nedunchezhian would work in some college, dwelling at length on Kamban's poetic acumen (by compulsion) and on Ilango Adigal (of his own accord), delineating the charms of the Tamil language." But what actually happened later was quite contrary to Anna's prophesy. It was Anbazhagan who became a college professor, yet sooner rather than later, threw in his lot with the

DMK. In fact, the two students of Annamalai University stamped the Tamil political arena with their originality.

Annamalai University days

Whenever both Anbazhagan and Nedunchezian were spoken about, it was their Annamalai University days which dominated the narrative rather than their political contributions.

When Anna went to the university to deliver a speech in 1942, most of the students opposed him. Then it was Anbazhagan who, as the secretary of the students' forum, brought Anna on to the stage to speak, even in the face of heavy opposition. At the meeting along with Anna, both Anbazhagan and Nedunchezian also spoke. After the meeting, hundreds of students including those who tried to stall Anna's speech rallied behind Anna and hailed him as their elder brother (Anna).

It was the seeds sown by Anbazhagan fearlessly on the campus which gradually turned the Annamalai University into a massive tree of the Dravidian Students' Movement.

Anbazhagan had learnt Tamil in the university from Kaa. Subramaniyanar hailed as 'Palkalai Pulavar' (Master of University) and as 'Tamil Kaasu'. Anbazhagan accompanied Subramaniyanar wherever the latter went to deliver speeches as a supporter of the Justice Party. At the meetings Anbazhagan also spoke.

This is one of links between the Dravidian Movement and the Tamil Movement, which have not been much spoken about.

The inseparable eye on the forehead

Not only Anna but also Karunanidhi who succeeded him in the DMK had shown his respect and goodwill towards Anbazhagan. "I

do not believe in mythology. But if the DMK is the Lord Siva, both Nedunchezian and I are right and left eyes respectively. The eye on the forehead is Anbazhagan. It is that unusual eye that torches evils,” said Karunanidhi at a function got up to celebrate the birthday of Anbazhagan in Chennai in 1974. About 50,000 attended the event.

Though Neduchezhian had defected to MGR’s party, Anbazhagan remained steadfast to Karunanidhi as an inseparable eye on the forehead.

Even if Anbazhagan had continued as a professor, he would have earned his own glory. His presence in politics was one of the reasons for the political events taking on the hues of literary discourses.

Responding to criticism from the Congress about the DMK government led by Anna, Anbazhagan said, “Should a crow criticize the hues of a parrot?” This comment of literary charm hit the headlines then. His discourses and speeches were full of charming descriptions and colorful comparisons. His words were tinged with not only linguistic ornamentations but also keen perspectives of scholars from various disciplines.

A journey of consistent ideological belief

Generally political leaders’ speeches and writings would sound inconsistent when read after a few years. But there was no such problem with Anbazhagan’s speeches.

He said, “From the day the DMK was born and prior to that, from the day the DK was formed, I had been intertwined with them. Be it my student days or the days of teaching profession or the days of being an MLA or those of an MP, in all those days it was the DMK’s ideologies which had been warp and woof of my core

being, my body, my breath and my passions.” (Murasoli, Chennai: 16.04.1968).

He did not give up his ideological loyalty even when he figured in the Tamil Nadu Cabinet as one of the senior ministers. As he had started his political career with Periyar, the DK celebrated with more fanfare the start of his centenary rather than the DMK. K. Veeramani recalled on a note of gratitude that it was Anbazhagan’s act of translating Sunday Observer Balasubramaniam’s speech at the DK’s Salem conference, which was a turning point in the history of the Dravidian Movement.

Of all frontline leaders who had rubbed shoulders with Anna, it was Anbazhagan, who had joined hands with Karunanidhi in a strong grip forever. He had shown the same affections towards M.K.Stalin too. Had he been alive now, he would have hailed Udhayanidhi as a Minister. Quite appropriately, Udhayanidhi had paid tributes to Anbazhagan’s portrait.

The pages containing Anbazhagan’s speeches and writings reflecting his steadfast ideological conviction and rebuttal of detractors’ criticism probably run into thousands. Similarly, the speeches he delivered as a minister holding the portfolios of people’s welfare, education and finance are likely worth thousands of pages.

If all his writings and speeches are collated, combined and documented properly, that will be a massive treasure house of the Dravidian movement’s history.

**December 19 marks completion of Anbazhagan’s centenary.
Translated by V. Mariappan.**