

Tho. Paramasivan, a multi-faceted researcher



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Prof. Tho. Paramasivan's personality can hardly be completely understood through a single label of 'cultural researcher.' Two years on after his demise, we still realize the need for the presence of the distinguished Tamil scholar, folklorist, anthropologist every day. He is a scholar who can dwell at length eloquently on both Periyar and Periazhvar alike. He had identified himself as a Periyarist. His research methodology, though, was based on Marxist fundamentals. It was his stance and his belief too that cultural movements and activities are based on the materialist foundations.

Once asked why he, being a Periyarist, always spoke about gods, he replied: "Periyar targeted the big gods that the Brahmins had created in order to retain their social and spiritual hold on the society. He was not bothered about the folk deities or folk temples which do not have any power on the society. He strove and

struggled to set the people free from the shackles of slavery of thought and so took on power tooth and nail. My writings too have the same objective of identifying the same suffocating power. Particularly, I have written a lot about the temples of Jains and Buddhists, which were stolen by the Vedic Sanatana. As far as folk deities are concerned, I have written about their origin, reasons for their origin, worshipping methods and the faith of the masses. They too are an indirect atheism.”

At a time when the world of research was purely dependent on inscriptions and historical records, it was Prof. Tho. Paramasivan who brushed them aside and came down to the streets and pioneered the practice of having a dialogue with the people and basing studies on the dialogue.

We have got two eminent researchers – Aa. Sivasubramanian and Tho. Paramasivan – who took Prof. Naa. Vanamamalai’s folklorist studies to the next level.

The learned called research scholars may not have accepted Tho. Paramasivan’s writings shorn of footnotes and bibliographies. But readers and social activists had celebrated his writings. As Professor A. Marx pointed out, his readers had become his fans. We were just carried away and bowled over by his words that reconstructed history and culture – the words uttered in front of a stone in the street.

When Tho. Paramasivan was working as the Head of the Tamil Department in the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University near Tirunelveli, as I too was working in the city, I had several occasions and opportunities to interact with him. In those days, he had just returned after discovering the ‘Niyaya Paripala Perumpalli’ at Singhikulam near Kalakkad in Tirunelveli district. He had discovered that the temple, now celebrated by the Hindus as Bhagavathi Amman Temple, was, in fact, once the Jains’ Palli and was seamlessly talking about his discovery. Later, he took many of us to the site, as was his custom. He compiled his own

informal speeches into an article titled as 'Idhuvae sananayagam' (This exactly is Democracy).

Even after the Saivite sage-poet Gnanasambandhar ensured impalement of thousands of Jains in Madurai in 7 CE, Jainism had been alive and kicking till 12th century in south Tamil Nadu. The idols of Jain sages called Theerthankarars, scattered mutilated and damaged across forests and fields in Tirunelveli district, are a testament to this historical fact.

Even 700 years after the extinction of Jainism from Tirunelveli district, this 'Niyaya Paripala Perumpalli' at Singhikulam still stands alive. On examination of this temple, an epigraph stands around the sanctum sanctorum of the Theerthankarar, telling us several untold historical facts.

It was a Jain 'palli' (temple was referred to as 'palli' by Jains). The mountain the 'palli' is situated at is Jinagiri. The 'Niyaya Paripala Perumpalli' located in Rasarasanallur in Mullinadu was established in the name of 'Tamila Pallavarayan, big brother, a good Peruman to me.' Evidences to establish the identity of this Theerthankarar could not be traced in the idol.

The worship of Isakki Amman called 'Ambika Yatchi' peaks now in Tirunelveli district. The 23rd Jain Theerthankarar Neminathar had Ambika as his maid. When the sanctum sanctorum for the Theerthankarar was built, an ancillary one was also built for Ambika. Now, in a reversal of status, Ambika's idol is celebrated as Bhagavathi Amman and worshipped as the main deity and the Theerthankarar's idol as the secondary.

This temple witnesses no sacrifice of animals, no hoisting of flags and no festival either. People visit the temple and make the ritualistic 'pongal' on the days convenient to them and worship the Bhagavathi Amman.

The Hindus worshipping the Bhagavathi Amman and Muneeswarar at the temple do not know that their goddess was

once a Jain deity and their god was none other than a Jain Theerthankarar. A Jain palli was converted into a Hindu temple of goddess maintained, celebrated and worshipped by all people of the region.

Generally, the poor people at the lowest rung of the society have no inhibitions about adopting an orphaned child and raising it as their own child. That was how the simple rustic people of Singhikulam had adopted the Jain palli as their own temple of Bhagavathi Amman.

It is history of the past and of the present too that it is only rulers, ministers and officials who go all out to demolish others' places of worship. The bona fide democratic people at the lowest level will never do that.

This is the message that the 'Niyaya Paripala Perumpalli' at Singhikulam conveys to us. (From Tho. Paramasivan's article 'Idhuvae Sananayagam').

Who is there but Tho.Pa.Si to educate us like this?

He was a great teacher who took us from the field to history and politics. He viewed history not with a top-down approach, but with a bottom-up approach; that is, he spoke about history, standing in the midst of the common people at the lowest rung of the society.

He said aloud, standing atop the Bhagavathi Amman temple, that religious animosity was not among the people and it was deliberately built up from the top.

Dec. 24 marks Tho.Paramasivan's death anniversary.

Translated by V.Mariappan.