

TAMIL DAILY

They are the abstract and brief chroniclers of time.

SHAKESPEARE, Hamlet

Kalaithanthai left his mark on Tamil journalism too. For long he had wanted to start a newspaper in Tamil. He had begun his career as a correspondent of *The Morning Leader* of Ceylon and knew the power of the media. He had original views on various issues and he felt that it was his duty to put them forth, though they might not find immediate acceptance. He strongly felt that a newspaper was the proper medium for the purpose. He had clear ideas on what lines Tamil Nadu should develop, what was to be done for the improvement of Tamil language and literature and what should be done to improve industry. How could he take these to the people and the government? To have his own newspaper seemed the proper course and the Tamil daily *Tamil Nadu* was born.

The choice of the name itself shows Kalaithanthai's deep love for Tamil. The paper started publication on 10-10-1951 from Madurai. For a brief period an edition was published from Madras too. It existed as a daily newspaper for seventeen years, and, as a weekly for five years. It used literary Tamil. In the first issue Kalaithanthai set out the basic tenets of the paper. Quoting the first couplet of *Tirukkural*, he said,

This daily with the name *Tamil Nadu* is being published from today. The Tamils are a very ancient race with a mighty civilization flourishing from time immemorial. We venture on this publication with the conviction that the paper devoted to preserving the art, culture and rights of the Tamils will be cherished by Tamilians.

His aim was that all over Tamil Nadu, people should develop a passionate interest in Tamil language and culture. The daily was popular, and at one stage its circulation reached 30,000.

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Tamil Nadu was a journal with a difference. The difference lay in its presentation of news. With the introduction of English education, Tamil, like the other Indian languages, had been relegated to the background. It was only after the national movement for Independence was started, there was a kind of renaissance of Tamil. Tamil newspapers were started. But the language used in them and elsewhere was a kind of mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil. There was opposition to this from Tamil scholars and there started a 'war' between the supporters of 'pure' Tamil unmixed with Sanskrit words and the others, much on the lines of the 'war' between Saxonists and Latinists in England in the Elizabethan period. While the other leading Tamil dailies and magazines used English words freely and a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil, *Tamil Nadu* used 'pure' Tamil without an admixture of English or Sanskrit. Kalaithanthai was particular that 'pure' Tamil should be popularized. Journalism is said to debase language by overusing 'charged' words. Kalaithanthai wanted his paper to enrich the language. His paper set the trend and the other papers, like *Dinamani*, had to change the kind of language they used. The impact of *Tamil Nadu* can be clearly understood if one compares the language used in papers before its advent and after.

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He picked on Professor M. Ratnaswamy, a great scholar, who had been the Principal of Pachiappa's College, Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University, the Chairman of the State Public Service Commission, and the Chairman of the Madras Legislative Council, to be the editor of *Tamil Nadu*.

Kalaithanthai had often met Professor Ratnaswamy before and had been struck by his concern for Tamil culture. It was soon after Independence, and Ratnaswamy was a Tamil enthusiast, who felt that something must be done to uphold Tamil values and channelize public opinion. A newspaper would be necessary to give the proper lead to the people. The adoption of Hindi as the official language in the Constitution alarmed many Tamils who feared that Tamil identity would be destroyed. One reason why Kalaithanthai started *Tamil Nadu* was to give shape to the views of Tamilians and to oppose the introduction of Hindi as the official language.

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Kalaithanthai was the managing editor, Karumuttu T.Manickavasagam Chettiar, the editor, and Professor Ratnaswamy, the executive editor of *Tamil Nadu*. Tiruvacakamani K.M.Balasubramaniam and T.A.V.Nathan, a descendant of Sadaiyappar, the patron of Kambar, worked full time and many Tamil professors part time and helped to make it popular with lovers of Tamil.

Daily in the evening, Kalaithanthai would discuss with Professor Ratnaswamy the day's important news and the next day's editorial with great political maturity. Ratnaswamy would absorb Kalaithanthai's ideas and produce excellent editorials. The editorials were worthy of being collected into a book. But few realized their worth then.

The newspaper coined new Tamil words, words that came to be accepted later. We can easily give a list of English words for which the paper coined good Tamil equivalents:

Commission, Board, Candidate, minister, bus, soft drink, office, Governor, Central government, State government, Government order, licence, money order, taluk, district, collector, Revenue department, magistrate, appeal, Recreation club, driver, conductor, public sector, private sector, hospital, dispensary/pharmacy, session (in parliament), *concert*, and many others.

Tamil Nadu was the first Tamil newspaper to coin countless such words and give them currency. It also revived old words with new meanings. It did valuable service to Tamil in the field of mass communication. The Sunday edition contained literary essays,

stories and cinema news. The book reviews, the literary essays and short stories went well with young minds.

S.P. Raman was in charge of the section on the cinema, and on the US government's invitation, he went to America and studied the working of small newspapers, their publishing modes and their general layout.

Tamil Nadu played no mean part in the spread of 'pure' Tamil in writing, in the publication of new books in Tamil and in strengthening the anti-Hindi movement in Tamil Nadu. For the sake of Tamil, Kalaithanthai faced opposition boldly and single-handedly.