



ROLE OF SWADESAMITRAN JOURNAL IN INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

V. Parameswari

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Cuddalore, Tamilnadu

Cite This Article: V. Parameswari, "Role of Swadesamitran Journal in Indian Freedom Movement", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page Number 93-97, 2018.

Abstract:

Journalism is the "guardian angel of democracy". Roland E. Wolsely, the famous American professor of Journalism defines Journalism thus: "Journalism is the systematic and reliable dissemination of public information, public opinion and public entertainment by Modern Mass Media of Communication" Nationalism is a modern phenomenon. The roots of nationalism can be traced from the French Revolution of 1789. According to G.P. Gooch, "Nationalism is a child of the French Revolution". After this revolution nationalism began to play an important role in the evolution of mankind. Since it is a historical phenomenon, the nature of nationalism differs from country to country due to the different political thoughts and social structures. The role of journalism in India during the freedom movement represents a shining chapter in the history of the totality of our national movement. The journals have been inextricably linked with the spread of education and the general awakening of national pride and socio-political consciousness among different segments of the people. The impulses released and the intellectual and emotional ferment created by the journals have been greatly responsible for the awakening the Freedom Movement in its various phases. The contribution of the *Swadesamitran* and the India for the furtherance of nationalism was great indeed. In July 1905 the spirit of was found only in the press, but not main test among the people. The *Swadesamitran* and the India, by their militant advocacy and instant appeals to emotion and religious sentiments, carried the message *Swadeshi* and boycott to the masses, there by preparing the ground for involvement in nationalist politics.

Role of Swadesamitran Journal in Indian Freedom Movement:

The term Journalism is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica as "The profession of gathering, writing and editing the news". Journalists enjoy a unique status in the society that amply justifies their designation as the "Fourth Estate". Journalism is both an art and a profession which records events and opinions and seeks to interpret and mould them for the benefit of the educated public.

Man from time immemorial has been curious to know about what, why and how events have occurred. He tried to overcome the lack of information knowledge and communication gap in various ways. Finally, by his continuous striving and experimentation the journal came to forefront ¹. Journalism is generally considered as the most significant mass media capable of moulding the public opinion. It acts as a mediator between the Government and the masses. The 'Journals' were the instrument for the growth of nationalism.

Journalism is the "guardian angel of democracy". Roland E. Wolsely, the famous American professor of Journalism defines Journalism thus: "Journalism is the systematic and reliable dissemination of public information, public opinion and public entertainment by Modern Mass Media of Communication"²

The term "Journal" means a daily record, as of occurrences or observations. It includes a newspaper especially a daily one, a periodical or magazine especially published for a learned society.

The Journals inform the public about the policies and programmes of the government and provide opportunity for them to express their reaction to the governmental measures. The Journals are really the eyes of the nation through which it should see where it stand as and what exactly its position is ³.

Journals played a definite role in infusing the common people into bitter aversion of the British rulers. Journals took up the propagation of the revolutionary ideals of freedom in the country as its them.

Nationalism is a modern phenomenon. The roots of nationalism can be traced from the French Revolution of 1789. According to G.P. Gooch, "Nationalism is a child of the French Revolution". After this revolution nationalism began to play an important role in the evolution of mankind. Since it is a historical phenomenon, the nature of nationalism differs from country to country due to the different political thoughts and social structures ⁴.

Nationalism is the sense of unity that exists among people. This may emerge due to a common religion, race, language, history etc. A nation is group of people with a feeling of solidarity among themselves or a sense of unity that exists in a group of men for some common purpose. It can also be said to be a sense of separation from other people i.e. Foreigners. Nationalism demands political independence. If political independence is not present, it tends to develop a new sovereign state. Nationalism demands a nation-state and the creation of nation-state strengthens nationalism. Nationalism, as a form of group consciousness, is one of the most powerful emotions of all civilised people. The journals reflected the emotions of all civilised people.

The journals reflected the emotions of the people and their feelings of national urge and grievances. The editors and the journalists of India gave publicity to the concepts of representative government,

independence and civil liberty. They were in fact combatants in a national struggle⁵.

The role of journalism in India during the freedom movement represents a shining chapter in the history of the totality of our national movement. The journals have been inextricably linked with the spread of education and the general awakening of national pride and socio-political consciousness among different segments of the people. The impulses released and the intellectual and emotional ferment created by the journals have been greatly responsible for the awakening the Freedom Movement in its various phases.

Naturally the alien masters at different times felt that if the press could be muzzled, the momentum towards a struggle for self government and freedom would be curtailed. Journalism in different parts of the country, in English and other regional languages, are always conscious of its role and responsibility as the torch-bearer to people and their aspirations⁶.

The term vernacular Journalism has been coined by the Britishers to publish Journals in the native languages of the people. During the early part of Nineteenth century, a number of journals in the vernacular languages began to grow. The Governor-General Lord William Bentick's role in developing the vernacular press was marvelous. He firmly believed that "liberty of the press is one of the most useful engines for promoting good administration in the country"⁷.

Richard Johnston was the founder of the first newspaper in Madras presidency. His paper "The Madras Courier" came into existence on October 12, 1785. The pioneer Tamil Journal was the "Tamil Magazine" which was published in 1831 started by the Madras Religious Tract Society. It was followed by the journal "Raja Vritti Bodhini" on 1833. P. Percival founded the Journal "Dinavartamani" on 1855⁸.

In its initial phase the Tamil Journalism was concerned almost solely with social and religious causes. Tamil journals attention was focused on existing social evils among the masses. When the grievances of the people against the British rulers multiplied, the concentration of Tamil press turned to political affairs. It resulted in the culmination of the demand for self-government.

There were very few Tamil newspapers played an eminent role in the freedom movement in Tamilnadu. In this connection, it is beyond doubt that each and every Tamil journalists did his best service not only to his country but also for the development of Tamil language. But very few Journals published articles in connection with the Freedom Movement and inspired the masses. *Swadesamitran* (1882)⁹. Journals played a valiant part in the struggle for freedom. Particularly Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement.

The *swadesmitran* was a unique newspaper in those days for the other paper's was no more transmitter of news and information. It was published by an intellectual and patriot who held public angry people and to elevate them to response citizenship¹⁰.

The *Swadesamitran* became a biweekly in 1886. The *Swadesamitran* steadily advanced and towered above all the papers in its quality. Coverage of news, popular appeal and reach. It enjoyed access to latest news from various parts of the country as it was published the Hindu complex¹¹.

An analysis of the editorial matters for the year revealed that the *Swadesamitran* devoted forty-five per cent for relating to internal affairs of the presidency without the action of any race question, another forty-five per cent for matters concerning relation between the European rulers and the native rulers, and their administration in India.

The annual subscription of the *Swadesamitran* daily cost rupees thirteen. The professional side of Tamil press was also as weak as its prospects. The first difficulty in this regard was the obtaining of news. No Tamil Newspapers of the early twentieth century including the *Swadesamitran* employed correspondents even within Tamilnadu to report news¹².

The *Swadesamitran* improved its status by the turn of the century and created an interest in newspaper reading among the Tamils; G. Subramania Iyer was now able to devote his full attention to the paper. He returned from England in July 1897 after giving evidence for Welby Commission on Indian expenditure¹³.

The pre eminence of The *Swadesamitran* in Tamil Journalism might be by the fact that other periodicals like the Tarangai Nesan, Aryajana pariplini and Brahavidya. In addition to discussions in their own columns, chose the columns of the *Swadesamitran* to fight issues relating to religious and social reforms.

When complained of hard style in the *Swadesamitran*, its assistant Editor Sundaram Pillai defend that such a style and vocabulary was inevitable for he believed that prose writing in Tamil was not very much developed. He further pointed out that it was easier to write a perfect verse on a perfect piece of prose in Tamil. In 1904 the *Swadesamitran* addressed only 1750 subscribers¹⁴.

Thus two Tamil newspapers had come to take up the cause of Swadeshi in the Tamil region. The *Swadesamitran* of G. Subramania Iyer the India of C. Subramania Bharathi were two different shades and their distinct voices of extremist nationalism. They different in their style, tone and also in their ultimate objectives extremist nationalist to the former was a political and to the latter a religious of India was clarion call for heroic deeds and sacrifice¹⁵.

The position of the *Swadesamitran* as a potent medium of mass communication was beyond any doubt, its ideological mornings demanded on its part certain policy adjustment in order to pioneer extremist nationalist

in Tamilnadu. The *Swadesamitran* considered the British rule in India as providential and beneficial. The *Swadesamitran* systematically propagated the advantages of encouraging Indian manufacture. The *Swadesamitran* first began creating in the minds of the people a confidence of the utility and durability of indigenous goods.

The contribution of the *Swadesamitran* and the India for the furtherance of nationalism was great indeed. In July 1905 the spirit of was found only in the press, but not main test among the people. The *Swadesamitran* and the India, by their militant advocacy and instant appeals to emotion and religious sentiments, carried the message Swadeshi and boycott to the masses, there by preparing the ground for involvement in nationalist politics¹⁶.

The *Swadesamitran* has been to the Tamil knowing public a revelation it something that has informed their intellect, stimulated their fancy and proved a communal bond of no insignificant services. It has given them sight a spirit of co-operation and or measure of self-confidence of which they were never before aware.

The *Swadesamitran* after some initial hesitation became a vigorous advocate of boycott also. The *Swadesamitran*, true its tradition, was to advocate such a strategy that would estrange relation between the British and the Indians. So when the resolutions of *swadeshi* and boycott were first passed at Calcutta in August 1905, the *Swadesamitran* strongly supported the resolution were not intended to harm British commercial interests.

The *Swadesamitran* visualised great economic changes in the wake the Swadeshi movement. It advocated the establishment of big industrial and commercial firms in the Madras presidency as in Bengal, Bombay, April 11, 1906 the later materialized and received much support from the *Swadesamitran*¹⁷.

The other extremist voice in Tamilnadu was the India. It joined hands with the *Swadesamitran* in May 1906 in order to intensity the propaganda of Swadeshi and boycott of British Goods in Tamilnadu. That was entirely a different type of news paper on ordinary reader of news of information of usual interest. The *Swadesamitran* leads unperturbed by this social schism, or unwilling to give prominence to the non-Brahman movement, the *Swadesamitran* concentrated on home rule propaganda. It increased the campaign reference to public meetings in support of self Banner headlines, decorated box columns and photos were new features that the *Swadesamitran* adopted in the Hindu Rule campaign It was the singular achievement of the *Swadesamitran* to calculate the demand for Home Rule among the literates of smaller towns and villages; The task of The *Swadesamitran* was made more difficult when Justice party published their Tamil daily Dravidan which directed its check against the Brahmans in two ways. However, the *Swadesamitran* issued a different course and played a crucial role in setting political against the Non-Brahmin Movement¹⁸.

The office of "The *Swadesamitran*" as well as the house of Subramania Iyer both in Madras was searched. To substantiate the charges leveled against him. (i) A whip to the Indians, (ii) In an Indian or European Superior? (iv) One: meal for two days, (v) Who is a Bad Magistrate?, (vi) What is to May and 3 and 6th June 1908¹⁹?

The Tamil Translator to government at his Saidapet and the required issues of the Journal "The *Swadesamitran*". A statement along with the dates and headings as given in the newspaper themselves of all the extracts which formed the enclosures to letters No.563 (a) and 563 24th June 1908 is herewith forwarded²⁰.

The advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene of India marked a great change in the attitude of the Indian Journalism also. Gandhiji awakened the political consciousness of the Indian people. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi Journalism means, "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feelings and give expression to them; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects"²¹.

During the Freedom Movement many great men have chosen journalism because it was an effective way to spread their ideas to the people. There were many who wielded their pen to strengthen the Freedom Movement. The press played an important role and awakened the people and infused them in the sense of patriotism and consciousness for nationality²².

Swadesamitran was the first Tamil journal to raise the voice of Nationalism. This journal was first published in March, 1882, by G.Subramania Iyer. He has started '*Swadesamitran*' to spread patriotic sentiments among the masses. It was a pioneering effort of G. Subramania Iyer and very soon he gained popularity in Tamil journalistic circle. After Subramania Iyer's death in 1916 A. Rangaswami Iyengar took over the editorship of the paper. He has brought out many changes in its format and contents and improved it further²³.

The famous poet and patriot Subramania Bharathi, who was also a noted Tamil journalist entered the portals of journalism through the '*Swadesamitran*', where he served as a sub-editor, for a short span of time. '*Swadesamitran*' aroused the spirit of freedom in the minds of the students and motivated them to fight for the fruitful cause. This journal was the principal supporter of the Freedom Struggle in South India. It presented the articles in a effective Manner. This journal *Swadesamitran* inspired the students to work vigorously in accordance with the resolutions of the congress, in order to achieve "*Swaraj*" within nine months²⁴.

The journal *Swadesamitran* highlighted the corruption of the British officials, their Mal-administration and their racial arrogance. It placed before the people the important contemporary problems. Almost in every issue

Swadesamitran used to publish editorials pertaining to freedom struggle. These editorials inspired the national spirit of the people. *Swadesamitran* concentrated more on the spread of nationalism rather than the development of language, style and rhythms.

Swadesamitran published articles against the Punjab massacre. It has requested the National Congress leaders to take necessary action against the British General Dwyer and his followers. It further stressed that the General Dwyer should be punished severely for his cruel action²⁵.

Mahatma Gandhi emphasised the importance of the spinning wheel and advocated the people to use this indigenous tool. *Swadesamitran* also supported Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about the spinning wheel and it published a number of articles in support of this²⁶. In one of the effective articles on non-cooperation, whether constructive or destructive, "*Swadesamitran*" justifies the policy underlying the non-cooperation Movement as a constructive but not a destructive one, as much as it inculcates the principles of universal brotherhood, self-reliance, national education, etc. In short, all that tends to foster the National instincts for the welfare of India²⁷.

The *Swadesamitran* criticised the salt tax and regarded it as "The most unjust and cruel of all the taxes imposed on the country". *Swadesamitran* took the initiative and never hesitated to criticise the policies of the government²⁸.

Swadesamitran played a dominant role during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Both the papers published a number of articles about the Civil Disobedience Movement. Their function of furnishing information contributed more to the movement. Majority of the people began to feel that the Civil Disobedience Movement alone can be released as the best political weapon to set India free.

In the latter half of the 1930s, the Civil Disobedience Movement received a setback by the oppressive tactics of the government of India. For example, the Press Ordinance of May 1930 precipitated the crisis. Simultaneously, the government of India went ahead with the plans to convene the Round Table Conference in London. The first Round Table Conference held in 1930 without the representation of the Congress party. The British wanted a settlement with the Congress party and signed a pact with Gandhiji on 5th March, 1931 known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact²⁹.

The journals of Tamil Nadu appreciated the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. According to the pact, Gandhiji agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference on September 1931. The British Government in turn accepted to withdraw the ordinance against Civil Disobedience and release all political prisoners except the terrorist activities. Further, the people were allowed to make salt for their domestic needs and permitted to picket liquor shops peacefully. Hence Gandhiji agreed to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement. By this time, Lord Willington had succeeded Lord Irwin as viceroy.

While Gandhiji was in England to attend the Second Round Table Conference, terrorism started in Bengal. Many British officials were murdered. Hence the British Government was forced to pass many ordinances. One such was the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act of 1931. The *Swadesamitran* accused the Anglo-Indians and European Association of being responsible for the passing of the Bill. At London, Gandhiji announced openly that the Congress party would not accept anything less than complete freedom. Gandhiji returned to Bombay on December 29, 1931 and wrote a letter to the viceroy protesting against the promulgation of the various ordinances³⁰.

The journal *Swadesamitran* published a report about Mahatma Gandhiji's health and his way of living in the place of his detention. The Madras Press Advisory Committee prohibited the publication of this Statement³¹.

Political journals in Tamil were rather a belated phenomenon. The stringent policy adopted towards the press by the Government of Madras prevented journalistic enterprises in publishing the political news. It was only with the emergence of G. Subramania Iyer, Tamil press discovered the father of political journalism in Tamil.

The Tamil Journals of the early Twentieth century were a weak social institution. Even the rise of the "*Swadesamitran*" was only a sign of growth and not an index to the actual strength of the Tamil journals. The Tamil press generally lacked capital, journalistic expertise and popular support.

The decisive role played by the journal *Swadesamitran* in the Freedom Movement has been further confirmed in the words of Lord Listowell, the last Secretary of State for India, "The Indian Newspapers have every reason to be proud of the part they have played in the great constitutional change and of the good influence they have exercised on Indian opinion".

Conclusion:

By taking up regional and national issues that were vital for people's welfare, *Swadesamitran* helped both the creation and the crystallization of public opinion in the Indian freedom struggle.

References:

1. Rangaswami Parthasarathy, *Journalism in India*, 1989, New Delhi, p.11.
2. Nadig Krishna Murthy, *Indian Journalism*, Mysore, 1966, p. 65.
3. Ibid, p. 68.
4. Sukhbir Choudhary, *Growth of Nationalism in India*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1973, pp.1-2

5. Indian Writers Union, Makers of Modern India, New Delhi, 1973, p.104.
6. Motial Bhargava, Role of Press in the Freedom Movement, New Delhi, p.1.
7. Nadig Krishnamurthy, Op. Cit., p.219.
8. Sundaramoorthy M. R. Arasu (Ed), Indhiya Viduthalaikku Munthaiya Tamil Ithalgai, part-I Chennai, 1998, pp 12-13.
9. N.V. Krishna Warrior (Ed), Contribution of writers to Indian Freedom Movement, Vol. II, 1988, p.1195.
10. Fortnightly Reports 1883
11. S.P. Sen, Historical Writings on the Nationalist Movement in India, P.121
12. K. Mohan Ram, Tamil press and the Colonial Rule, p.56
13. A.M.A. Samy, History of Tamil Journals, p.120
14. A.S. Iyengar, Role of press and Indian Freedom Movement, p. 171
15. Ibid., p. 172.
16. N.V. Krishna Warrior, Contribution of Writers of Indian Movement, p. 1171.
17. S.P. Sen, Historical Writings on The Nationalist Movement in India, p.201.
18. K. Mohan Ram, Tamil press and the Colonial Rule, p.117.
19. Saroja Sundarajan, Madras Presidency in the Gandhian Era: A Historical Perspective 1884-1915, p.355.
20. Ibid., p. 358.
21. Nadig Krishnamurthy, Op, Cit., P.96.
22. K.S. Singh, Indian Government and Politics, Cambridge, 1991, p.69.
23. S. Natarajan, A History of the Press in India, Bombay, 1962, p.34.
24. Swadesamitran, February 8, 1921, Native Newspaper Report, 1921, p.728.
25. Swadesamitran, April 10, 1920, Native Newspaper Report 1920. p.427.
26. Swadesamitran, April 9, 1921, Native Newspaper Report, 1921. p.495.
27. Swadesamitran, January 21, 1921 Native Newspaper Report, 1921, p.140.
28. Kudiarasu, May 2, 1925, Native Newspaper Report, 1925.
29. K. Balan, India's Freedom Struggle and National Integration, New Delhi, 1989, pp-96.76.
30. Fortnightly Report, Tamil Nadu Archives, November 20, 1933,
31. Fortnightly Report, II half March 1943.