

# An individual-cum-movement called Thodarban



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Way back in 1968 when the then Chief Minister C. N. Annadurai gave one minute to the participants each to introduce themselves at the Second World Tamil Conference held in Chennai, it took Ma. Su. Sambandhan just a few seconds to introduce himself as “Tamilian by language and Dravidian by race. My name is Ma.Su.Sambandhan”

Born in Chennai on May 25, 1923 as son of Marambedu Subramanian, Marambedu Subramanian Sambandhan was an unprecedented Tamil writer. He was educated in the Muthialpet Higher Secondary School and studied upto the second intermediate in Pachiappa's College in Chennai. His oeuvre is something on a par with a university's writing and publishing works taken together.

**‘That aficionado’**

It was Pulavar Ma. Rasamanickanar, a Tamil teacher in the Muthialpet school, who infused Sambandhan with the love of Tamil and trained him in writing prose. The teacher's natural qualities easily rubbed off on Sambandhan as the latter had already been fondly reading several books and magazines.

Sambandhan got his first article titled as 'The ancient civilization is needed' published in the magazine Bharatha Devi edited by Va.Raa (V. Ramasamy Iyengar). Besides, the article he wrote on G. D. Naidu as part of the column 'Life of the Great' in the journal 'Tamizhan' run by Si. Ba. Adithanar at Chindaripet, Chennai had probably intensified his desire for writing. The editor Ko. Da. Shanmugasundaram praised him for the article written after the students and teachers of the Muthialpet school returned from a tour of several places including Coimbatore and Mettur. The editor said, "That aficionado ('anbar' in Tamil) has given (in the article) several impressive matters." The praise had put Sambandhan on a cloud nine, who would not have felt as much exhilarated, had been awarded a B.A. degree.

## **Writing and publishing**

Sambandhan, who had decided to make writing and publication warp and woof of his life, set up the publishing house 'Tamizhar Pathippakam' in 1947. It was this publication that brought to light books such as Ka.Appadurai's 'Future Tamizhagam', Mu.Varadarasan's 'Ki.Pi. 2000,' Ki. Aa. Pe. Visuwanathan's 'Vaanoliyilae' and poet Tamil Oli's 'Veeraayi'.

Sambandhan, who ran and edited 'Tamizhar Malar,' a handwritten magazine, and printed magazines 'Murugu' and 'Mathi', was also a sub-editor in the newspaper 'Engal Naadu.' He was a member of the outfits - Tamizhar Peravai, Tamizhar Kazhagam, and YMCA Pattimandram (Discourse) and also held the general secretary and vice-president posts in the Tamil Writers' Association. For some time he worked as a junior officer in the Connemara Public Library.

## **Sambandhan with several dimensions**

The 10 important books written by Sambandhan are: 'Sirandha Pechalargal' (Distinguished Speakers) (1947), 'Tiruchi Viswanatham' (1954), 'Chennai Maanagar' (Chennai City) (1955), 'Achuk Kalai' (Art of Printing) (1960), 'Achum Padhippum' (Print and Publication) (1980), 'Ezhuthum Achum' (Writing and Print) (1990), 'Tamizh Idazhiyal Varalaru' (History of Tamil Journalism) (1989), 'Tamizh Idhazhiyal Suvadugal' (Imprints of Tamil Journalism) (1990), 'Tamizh Idhazhiyal Kalanjiyam' (Treasure of Tamil Journalism) (1990) and 'Thodarban Katturaigal' (Essays of Thodarban) (1998). These books were Sambandhan's unprecedented contributions to the Tamil-speaking world. Sambandhan, in the prologues to the books, has elaborately written about his painstaking search and research about the topics of the first book on public Tamil oration, biography, printing and publishing, and the history of journalism and journalists. In retrospect, his work, which was carried out as an individual initiative in an age technologically not so advanced as ours, seems awe-inspiring, astounding, and amazingly matchless. His pen name 'Thodarban' is naturally founded on his natural name Sambandhan.

## **Importance of his books**

His book 'Chennai Maanagar' was a pioneer for the literature on Chennai, a city with about 400 years of history. It was the small handbook 'The Handbook of Corporation' which ignited in him an ambition to write a comprehensive and exhaustive book about Chennai. Then he set out to do research on the subject and delved deep into over 15 books. Finally, he came up with his own book on Chennai. Yet he regretted in his prologue that he was not able to make use of all notes he had taken for the book (this kind of regret was his signature lamentation in all of his books). Hence he put out a request: "I seek the cooperation of the government, the city associations, and the public for bringing out such books."

Stumbling upon archival notes about old newspapers and magazines published in Chennai in the past during his research for the book 'Chennai Maanagar', Sambandhan felt inspired to write a book about Tamil journals. Hence he visited important libraries in Tamil Nadu to get data and information about the Tamil journals and magazines. Yet before writing the book, he thought it appropriate to write a book about the art of printing and came up with the book 'Achukkalai' (1960). At the end of the book, he gave references to 15 English books, pamphlets, and reports.

'Daily Thanthi' newspaper praised the book, saying it was the first book on the growth of Tamil printing art. Baktavatsalam, the then Chief Minister, awarded the first prize on behalf of the Tamil Development Movement to the book in 1966. In 1982 Chief Minister MGR gave away the government's prize to Sambandhan for his book 'Atchum Pathippum' (Print and Publishing). Subsequently, Sambandhan got prize in 1986 for his book 'The history of Tamil Journalism.'

## **Social work**

An aficionado of the Dravidian movement all along, Sambandhan, on an instruction from Annadurai, contested the Chennai Corporation elections and got elected from the ward Katchaleeswarar. "Comrade Sambandhan is very humble and has clarity of intellect and knowledge. He has the tendency of working in silence. No doubt, he will work hard for the betterment of the Tamil society," said Annadurai at the victory fete (Nam Nadu: 25.05.1959).

Sambandhan was, later, elected to the Senate in the Madras University. It was he who brought into public use the pure Tamil words such as 'vaetpaalar' (candidate), 'Thiru' (Mr.), 'Tirumathi' (Mrs.) and so on.

Very keen on making Tamil the medium of instruction in educational institutions, the government official language and the judiciary language, Sambandhan went on a march from

Kanyakumari to Chennai, raising the slogans “Tamil everywhere” and “Tamil in all.”

### **Whither gone Sambandhan?**

Sambandhan, who used to not tell his family whenever he went out and used to go on foot everywhere, had not returned till date after he went all the way to Periyar Thidal for a meeting. Then he was 89 years old. This year (2023) marks his centenary. It is quite unfortunate that he could not be traced since.

The Tamil Nadu government has nationalized his works. His books, long out of print, are set to be reprinted. He would have felt happier had he come to know of it.

Whither are you, dear Sambandhan?

**(May 25 marks completion of Ma.Su. Sambandhan’s centenary).**

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**Translated by V. Mariappan.**