

# **An unforgettable, yet forgotten Tamil poet**



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We recall with a sense of pride Singaravelar as the first leader in India who had celebrated May Day. But it is quite equally important to celebrate Tamil Oli as the first poet who hailed in his poetry the May Day.

Tamil Oli wrote in the magazine 'Munnani' his poem hailing the May Day in May, 1949. His poem begins thus: "O time, hail to you for having come to wipe off tears from the poor, anguished at their face, who rise at cockcrow and toil as bonded labor." The poem ends as follows: "O Love, May Day! Come you! You, the pearl buried in the sea of darkness! You, the Full Moon! Come you! I sing paens to you!"

## **In the footsteps of Bharati**

Tamil Oli is a Tamil poet who deserves a slot in the tradition of Tamil poetry next to Bharatidasan. Born at Aadoor near Kurinjipadi in Cuddalore district on Sept. 21, 1924, he lived in Puducherry till his death on March 23, 1965. In between he stayed in Chennai for over 10 years.

As a multi-faceted personality, Tamil Oli has carved out a niche in Tamil poetry though he lived only for 41 years. It is generally said it was Bharatidasan, who changed his original name Vijayarangam to Tamil Oli.

Tamil Oli has accepted national poet Bharati and Dravidian poet Bharatidasan as his predecessors. Yet he was a Marxist at heart and that was revealed during his Chennai life.

## **Marxian poet**

Though not trained in English, Tamil Oli learnt Marxism through Tamil and mastered the philosophy. He set up a branch in Chennai for the all-India progressive writers' association that had just emerged. A letter written by him on Dec. 12, 1949 to his friend (Balasundaram), elucidating Marxism shows how deeply he had assimilated Marxism not only emotionally but also intellectually.

Tamil Oli came from Puducherry to Chennai and met senior Communist leader Jeeva. Thereafter, he wrote poems in 'Janasakthi.' The Communist Party was banned in March, 1948

and in a fall-out, Janasakthi was shut down. At that time, poet Kuyilan launched the journal 'Munnani' in which Tamil Oli continued writing. When Munnani too was banned, Tamil Oli was forced to live incognito for a while.

### **Different attention**

In those days, the Communist Party did not pay much attention to two major problems about which Tamil Oli wrote poetry passionately. The Communist movement revolves around class struggle, believing that class struggle will demolish the caste structure. That was why it did not pay much attention to initiatives to resolve caste-oriented problems. But Tamil Oli wrote an epic with the central theme of caste. That was his epic 'Veerayi.' He was a Marxist who wrote anti-Hindi poetry when it was the major plank of campaign for the Dravidian parties.

His acceptance of his pen name 'Tamil Oli' is a testament to his love for Tamil as he projected himself as a Tamilian. One of his poems begins thus: "O Tamilian, hear."

Tamil Oli was not only a theoretical warrior but also a fighter who plunged into action. He had also taken part in the workers' agitation about which he wrote in his poetry.

He was not only a poet but also a strident critic and a researcher. He made his imprints in children's literature too. Though languishing in poverty, he enriched the Tamil literature by contributing nine epics.

The Tamil world should speak about Tamil Oli. In this context, the words of polyglot scholar Kaa. Appadurai are worth recalling: "I

could not understand that in my time there was such a great poet!”

Let us revive Tamil Oli’s writings and read them. You will certainly regret having failed to read them all these days.

**September 21 marks the beginning of Tamil Oli’s centenary.**

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**