

The history of naming the State as Tamil Nadu



R. Muthukumar, author of books including 'Dravida Iyakka Varalaaru'. For contact: writermuthukumar@gmail.com

Now the Tamil Nadu -Tamilagam narrative has revived, triggering serious discussions, generating a great deal of heat. Against this background it will be appropriate to look back on all relevant historical data so that a fundamentally strong perspective of the issue is cultivated.

Proclamations and life sacrifices

Those were the times which reverberated with the clarion calls proclaiming, "We must take proactive steps to have our state named as Tamil Nadu; let the nomenclature of Madras State go."

The patriarch of the Dravidian Movement E.V.R Periyar had openly said, "We cannot accept the administration's adamant refusal to name our State as Tamil Nadu even after the Malayalees, Telugus and Kannadigas have separated from us.

Hereafter we must use 'Tamil Nadu' in both written and spoken languages."

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Communist Party of India, Socialist Party, Thamizharasu Kazhagam and so on seamlessly stuck to their demand over the issue.

Even the Congress, the most influential party back in the day, had certain people who were on the same page. That was why Sankaralinganar was on hunger strike, pressing 12 demands including the one to rename the Madras State as Tamil Nadu. But the then Chief Minister K. Kamaraj refused to concede the demands. Finally, the agitating Gandhian freedom-fighter laid down his life.

Keeping the historic demand alive, the DMK brought in a resolution on the State naming issue in the Assembly on May 7, 1957 in the hope that it would be supported by the CM Kamaraj as the move had followed the death of Sankaralinganar. But the DMK's hopes were dashed to the ground when its resolution got the support of only 42 votes and was derailed by 127 votes. Though the move to name the State as Tamil Nadu was a damp squib, the DMK relentlessly pursued the goal, harping on the need for attaining the goal.

Relentless efforts

On Jan.30, 1961, Chinnadurai, a member of the Socialist Party, introduced the resolution again in the Assembly to name the State as Tamil Nadu while the ruling Congress was pressured inside and outside the Assembly to fulfill the demand.

Yet the CM Kamaraj wanted to push back the discussion on the issue one month. But the opposition parties including the DMK staged a walk-out and boycotted the Assembly proceedings, alleging that the government deliberately indulged in procrastination over the issue. Seeing no let-up in the agitation, the Kamaraj-led government climbed down, saying that 'Tamil

Nadu' could at best be used in the administrative correspondence. But the opposition parties were not satisfied with the assurance.

In Parliament

The Tamil Nadu naming issue grabbed the national limelight and the credit for it went to the late senior Communist leader Bhupesh Gupta who introduced the bill in the Rajya Sabha to name the State as Tamil Nadu. In fact, the bill was originally to be tabled by P. Ramamurthi, Communist leader from Tamil Nadu, but he could not attend the proceedings on the particular day. Gupta, speaking about the issue, said, "The Congress named its regional unit as the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, but why does it refuse to name the State as Tamil Nadu?"

C. N. Annadurai, DMK leader, who was also a member of the Rajya Sabha, supported the bill.

However, a Congress member, said by way of opposing the bill, "Till 500 years ago, there was no unified State known as Tamil Nadu. In fact, there were various states in the region such as the Chera Naadu, Chozha Naadu and Pandiya Naadu."

Countering the argument, Annadurai pointed out that great Tamil iconic poets Kambar and Chekkizhar had used the expression 'Tamil Nadu' and the turn of expression had long been in vogue in the State. He buttressed his argument with quotes from the ancient Tamil literary works such as Paripaadal, Pathitrapattu, Manimegalai, Chilipathikaram and so on.

Not ready to buy the argument, another member said, "What do you stand to gain from the name of Tamil Nadu?"

Anna, well-known for his resourcefulness and repartee, remained unfazed and retorted, "What did you gain from naming Parliament as Lok Sabha?"

However, that bill could not pass muster.

Arguments and counter-arguments

On July 23, 1963, again a resolution on the issue was brought in by Rama Arangannal in the Assembly. The then minister R. Venkatraman put forward a counter argument, saying, "The

word 'Madras' alone feels proud when uttered in the global arena. If the name is changed, all contracts made with other states and foreign countries will have to be corrected."

Then the DMK shot back, saying, "When Gold Coast was changed as Ghana, there was no problem. If it is the case with a country, what is the problem a State will face?"

Yet that move also bit the dust.

Final victory

After the DMK captured power, it took up the issue close on the heels of its electoral victory in 1967. Anna who donned the mantle of CM tabled a resolution in the Assembly to have the name of the State as Tamil Nadu in both English and Tamil. The opposition leader P. G. Karuthiruman suggested the name of 'Tamil Nadu-Madras State', saying that Madras had been a well-known name all over the world and Tamil Nadu would take a long time to become a popular name.

Speaking on the occasion, Anna said, "When speaking to some union ministers, I was told that the Indian Constitution would accordingly be amended if a resolution on the Tamil Nadu name was passed in the Assembly and sent to the union government. So we have got a good opportunity to amend the Constitution."

At long last the resolution was passed unanimously with the support of the ruling and opposition parties.

Recalling the immense role played by martyr Sankaralinganar and M. P. Sivagnam, leader of the Thamizharasu Kazhagam, on the count, Anna categorically said, "Just because the name is changed,

it does not mean that our state has become a separate country. Tamil Nadu will continue to be part of India.”

Consequently, a new board with ‘Tamil Nadu government chief secretariat’ blazoned across it started decorating the front of Fort St. George.

Translated by V. Mariappan.