CHAPTER - 5
ADIGALAR THE HEAD OF THE MUTT

Introduction

The Head of the Kunrakudi Mutt, Thavathiru (the most revered) Kunrakudi Adigalar, (1952 – 1995) was a renowned Tamil scholar endowed with oratoric skill and organizing ability. He had close access to top leaders of Tamil Nadu like K.kamaraj, C.N. Annadurai, M.Karunanidhi and M.G.Ramachandran - all were then Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu. He had close association with all India leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and his illustrious daughter Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Ministers Of India. In fact he was the most popular and influential and God - fearing head of the Mutts in Tamil Nadu. He was a voracious reader who dedicated his life - time for the promotion of Tamil language, literature and welfare of the people of Tamil Nadu, particularly the poor masses of Kunrakudi. He became the head of the Mutt of Kunrakudi in 1952\textsuperscript{1}. Since then the Kunrakudi Village achieved multifaceted growth. Its people were a striking historical episode in the social history of Tamil Nadu.

Besides his service to Tamil language and literature, his struggle for "social justice" and religious harmony, woman’s rights, prohibition and poverty alleviation had brought laurels not only to Kuntrakudi Mutt but also to the people of Kuntrakudi and surrounding villages. He made the Mutt not only popular but also people – centered. The people of Kuntrakudi rallied round Adigalar and the Mutt in all endeavors.\(^2\) Though he hail from a humble family, he scaled the height of glory by his contribution to Tamil language and the people of Kuntrakudi. The Kuntrakudi village became a model village in Tamil Nadu. The people of Kuntrakudi, even today, are of the opinion that the Kuntrakudi village was popular and prosperous more due to the ceaseless efforts of Adigalar\(^3\).

**Family and Background**

Aranganathan later known as Thavathiru Kuntrakudi Adigalar was born in Thiruvalaputhur, Nedunthittu village near Mayiladuthurai in Thanjavur District on 11 July, 1925.\(^4\) He was the last son of Srinivasan and Swarnathachi. His family background was economically poor. He belonged to the vellala community.

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\(^4\) op.cit p.6
In spite of his desire to join Indian Army and serve the country, he could not do so due to want of age. He worked in a paper industry for few months. He also served as a teacher for one month before he joined the monastery at Dharmapuram Mutt as a record clerk in 1944\(^5\). In the mean time he had finished the Tamil Vidhvan\(^6\) (Tamil Pandit) 3 years course during 1945-1948. His entry into the Mutt (monastery) was the turning point in his life. However, Aranganathan’s belief in God continued to grow and he was recognised as a saint during July 1945.\(^7\) He was clad in kavidress (Saffron color dress used by the saints) and he dedicated his entire life in the service to God. He became the Junior Saint of the Mutt in September 1949 and came to be called thereafter “His Holiness Sree La Sri Deivasigamani Arunachala Desika Paramachariyar Swamigal\(^8\)”.

Kunrakudi Thirukkailaya Parambarai Thiruvannamalai Adheenam was started by Thiruvarul Thiru Deivasigamani Desiga Paramachariya Swamigal in the year A.D.1310. The king

\(^5\) Ibid p.6
\(^7\) Ibid p.2
\(^8\) Chettinadum Chentamilum (History of Chettinadu and Tamil), Tamil, Vanthi Publications, Chennai, 1984, p.54.
Veeraballala (A.D.1291- A.D.1312) ruled Thiruvannamalai\(^9\). The king had helped to start the Thiruvannamali Adheenam Mutt. Paramachariya Swamigal was the first head of the Mutt. From A.D.1325 to A.D.1680, there were sixteen heads of the Mutt who ruled the mutt\(^10\). The 17\(^{th}\) head of the Mutt Thiru. Nagalinga Desiga Swamigal (A.D.1680 to A.D.1700) had visited Rameswaram. The Ramanatha Sethupathi, the king of Ramanathapuram received the Swamigal. The king wanted the swamigal to settle and stay in his kingdom to serve the people. So, the Adheenam settled and established the Mutt in Piranmalai\(^11\), Sivaganga District in A.D.1690. There were 13 heads of Mutt who served the people in Piranmalai area from A.D.1690 to A.D.1860\(^12\). Then the Mutt migrated from Piranmali to Kunrakudi in the year of 1860. From 1860, till date, Thiruvannamalai Adheenam functioning from Kunrakudi village. Fifteen heads of Mutt served the people from Kunrakudi village.


\(^{10}\) op. cit p.116

\(^{11}\) Piranmalai (PERAHMALLE) : It was a solid stonefort, embracing the declivity of a rockery projection, nearly perpendicular from a rugged and lofty mountain, it had the to entire walls, and fortified pettah outside the whole: each of the two outer places was completely commanded by the wall of the inner one, which was forty feet high, and perfectly impenetrable being cut out of the solid rock, with a mere parapet of stone, added above the terraplein. There are two tanks of water within each wall and a fine spring from rocks in the upper fort with many strong and capital buildings in the Chowltry form both forts cold J.Welsh “MILITARY REMINISCENCES: Vol 1, p.120.

\(^{12}\) Thiruchitraramblam Kunrakudi Thalavaralaru, Piranmalai Five Temple Devasthanam, 1979
Organiser

Adigalar founded the “Thirukkural Peravai” Thirukkural Association) on 11 June 1973\(^{13}\) to spread Thirukkural the greatest Tamil treatise on economy, polity, and philosophy. The Thirukkural Peravai also worked for the eradication of poverty and social inequality. Kuntrakudi Adigalar founded Daiveega Peravai (Divine Forum) and became its first president in 1969 and continued to retain that position till 1976. This Peravai has many branches and thousands of members all over Tamil Nadu. Adigalar has been propagating his ideas through this Peravai. As a merit of it Archagars (temple priests) were appointed from lower caste. In the year 1973, the conference of this Peravai was held at Thiruchirappalli. It was decided then that every branch of the Peravai should try to enroll as many as Hindu Harijans (untouchables) as possible. They should be invited to participate in the weekly prayers.

Adigalar organized Thiruvurul peravai iyakkam (திருவுருல் பேராவை ஈக்ககம்) in 1982. Most of the important and responsible religious leaders became members of this Peravai. This Peravai

\(^{13}\) Ooran Adigal, Vallalar Gandhi Paraniyil Arutselvan (Arutselvan way of Vallalar Gandhi), Tamil, Samarasa Sanmark Research Institution, Vadalur, Cuddalore – 1999, p.51.
came into existence due to the strenuous efforts of Adigalar. It enabled leaders of different religions and sects to meet and discuss problems relating to religious harmony. In fact this organisation was the result of the lessons of communal riots (1982) in Mandaikkadu, Kanyakumari district\(^{14}\) and communal riot in 1981 in Puliyankudi, in Thirunelveli District.

Adigalar had also organised functions to celebrate the memories of Saiva Saints Thirugnana Sambandar and Manickavasagar. Besides these functions there were also occasions for cleaning the temple premises.

He had also controlled many schools and colleges (See Appendix - 3)

Service to Tamil Language

Adigalar founded the Tiruppur Tamil Sangam\(^{15}\) (திருப்புர் தமிழ் சங்கம்) in 1967. The Sangam met twice a year. It analysed and suggested solutions for problems and issues relating to Tamil


\(^{15}\) Somalay, Chettinadum Chentamilum (Chettinadu and the Tamil Language), Tamil, Vasantha Publications, Chennai, 1984, p.171.
Language and literature. The purpose of the sangam was to honour the Tamil Scholars.

In 1954, Adigalar introduced Parivizha at Piranmalai, Sivaganga District. Piranmalai temple is under the control of Kunrakudi Mutt. Adigalar honoured the Tamil scholars in Parivizha function in the Tamil month of Chithrai (April) The King Pari was the great donor (kodai vallal) in the Post Sangam Age. Parivallal donated lot of things to the poets and the poor. In memory of King Pari this function was held. Adigalar also conducted Kamban vizha not only to bring back the memory of Kamban the author of the Tamil epic Ramayana but also to encourage oratory and literary criticism.

**Writer, Editor**

Kunrakudi Adigalar was an eminent scholar and writer in Tamil and has won an undisputed place in the literary world. Tamil is one of the great classical languages and traditions of the world.\(^{16}\) He was contributing articles on religion, politics, economics and society. He was the author of several books in Tamil and editor of

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\(^{16}\) “Statement on the Status of Tamil as a classical language” issued by the University of California, Berkely, 11\(^{th}\) April, 2000, (The Hindu, 9\(^{th}\) June 2004, p.15.)
Tamil Journals, Manimozhi (Tamil Language), Tamilagam (Tamil Nadu), Arulosai (Sound of God), Soolapadai (Warriors). Makkal Sinthanai (Wisdom of People) and Ariga Ariviyal (Science Knowledge).\textsuperscript{17}

The two socio - spiritual and scientific journals, Makkal sinthanai and Ariga Ariviyal are in circulation, even after his demise. Adigalar wrote more than 37 Tamil books.

He wrote many plays, notable among them being, Kalankarai Vilakkam, Bharatha thai, Puratchi Poothathu, Vallal pari and Puthu Vazhvu\textsuperscript{18}. He exposed his social reform ideas and thoughts through those dramas. These dramas were acted by Kunrakudi Arulneri drama troop. The troop staged many dramas in and around the Kunrakudi village stimulated social awareness through the dramas.

**Eminent orator**

Kunrakudi Adigalar was an eminent orator. He had a unique style of his own and every one of his speech was a literary peace in itself. His speeches were noted for clarity and originality of thoughts,

\textsuperscript{17} P.Sundar Arul Nerithanthai Adigalar, Bharathi Publications, Chennai, 1987, pp. 24,25.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p.19
masterly delivery and new interpretations. He made lasting impression on the audience. There was a great demand for his thoughtful ideas in Tamil Nadu.

His mastery over the language, grasp over the subject under discussion, the excellent analysis of the arguments of both sides, copious quotations from the modern and ancient literature and the impartial and considered verdict he delivered at the debates (Pattimanrams) would keep the audience spell bound.¹⁹

**Generator of Employment**

Adigalar generated employment opportunities. Thus he was interested in the development of Kunrakudi. Adigalar gave importance to science. So he started RURAL SCIENCE FORUM in Kunrakudi in 1987. The central Electro Chemical Research Institute (CECRI)²⁰ Karaikudi helped the rural science forum. His main contribution lies in the excellent work done by him in popularising and effectively transferring indigenously developed technology from

¹⁹ Interview with V.C. Kulandaiswamy, Former Vice Chancellor of Madurai Kamaraj University, on 10ᵗʰ February 2000, at Kunrakudi.

a national laboratory CECRI to the rural people in a way which had made a perceptible difference in their lives.  

Social Worker

Adigalar was a progressive social worker. He has done a lot of services in kunrakudi village. Adigalar was a true friend of the depressed classes. He served to improve the kunrakudi village. Adigalar was a man of hospitality, simplicity, sincerity, honesty, compassion and devotion. He was very much interested in development of the Kunrakudi village. He had really understood the problems of that village and strained every nerve for its upliftment. His concrete efforts for the depressed classes and the downtrodden were consonant with his convictions.

Contact with National Leaders

Adigalar had contact with many national leaders. Nehru was one among them. When Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister (1947 – 1964) of India, Adigalar made access to him. In appreciation of his role in the upliftment of the suppressed people,

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21 National Council for Science and Technology Communication, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.
The Government of India made him the member of the Advisory council for the depressed classes\textsuperscript{22}.

**Harijans Upliftment of the Untouchables**

Adigalar served to uplift the Harijans (untouchables) and the most Backward classes in Kunarakudi. He organized a Harijan conference at Kunarakudi on December 1961.\textsuperscript{23} He took out long march for Harijans welfare for 5 days. He gave a patient hearing to their grievances and took immediate steps for their redressed. He awarded many scholarships to Harijan students studying in the arts and professional colleges. Adigalar has organized separate association for the uplift of Harijans and most backward class communities in and around Kunarakudi. Adigalar issued housing sites for the poor Harijans who belong to Chinna Kunarakudi village, a part of Kunarakudi Village. He gave Plots to build houses for Harijan. Adigalar named this colony after K. Kamaraj who was devoted to the cause of upliftment of the Harijans and the poor. Adigalar was friendly with all the Harijans of Kunarakudi and made them participate in common weekly prayers and he used to enquire about their difficulties and cater to their needs.

\textsuperscript{22} P.Sundar, Arulnerithanthai Adigalar, Bharathi Publications, Chennai, 1987, p.28.

Social Humanist

In December 1968 communal riot broke out at Keezhavenmani village in Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu. Many Harijans' huts, were set fire. As many as 40 Harijans lost their lives. houses, cattle and other belongings. Adigalar condemned carnage and visited the affected area and arranged for the distribution of food and clothes to the victims of Keezhavenni village.

Adigalar was very much concerned about the condition of Kunrakudi village. He insisted on intercaste marriages and spoke against the dowry system on various occasions. He insisted also on women's education in Kunrakudi village.

Adigalar introduced the practice of Tamil Archanas (ஆர்சானா) in Tamil temples.\(^24\) First he introduced the Tamil archana in Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple in the year 1962\(^25\).

Adigalar served as a nominated member of the Upper House (Member of the State Legislative Council) for a period of five years

\(^{24}\) Dinamani, Daily Tamil News Paper, on 26, October, 1998.

from August 1969. He was keen in cleaning the temples and, so he found a movement called “Uzhavara Pani”. It means cleaning the temples. The movement cleaned, Shanmuganathan Temple in Kunrakudi Village.

Promoter of Co-operative Movement

He evinced keen interest in the promotion of people’s livelihood all the families in Kunrakudi village have been linked through the co-operative movement. All the plans are executed in co-operative basis. So, the profit is shared by the people themselves. He has made the villagers to hold shares in the co-operative societies. They stand to benefit out of this. They get jobs and good wages for their work. Adigalar has also helped them develop their self confidence by counseling to them frequently. He advised them to have faith in labour, to develop co-operative spirit and unity to wage a war against ignorance, and to achieve prosperity.

Every month, on the fourth Saturday he invited all the co-operative movement leaders and talked to them and ascertained the

26 Kumadham, Tamil Weekly magazine, Chennai 2004 p.78.
progress made by every society in production target achievement and marketing.\textsuperscript{27}

In this village when the Planning Council met all the members sit together and discussed problems. So, there was no question of caste, distinction or unsociability here.

Adigalar encouraged people to undertake some trade or other. Government also was keen to introduce first in this village all their new developmental schemes. The Scientists are often consulted in matters of increasing the output and production of goods. With the latest technical innovations they have started the Bharathi Pottassium Chlorate Industry, Arignar Anna Acid and Electrolytic Industry and Periyar Cashew Processing Centre. Because of this the villagers have got the opportunity in learning the latest scientific techniques. Adigalar propounded and practised the principle of “one family one job” in the village of Kunrakudi.

\textsuperscript{27} Interview with the Personal Assistant of Kunrakudi Adigalar on 20\textsuperscript{th} May, 2000.
This was a great attempt to eradicate hunger. In fact Kunrakudi was freed from the pangs of poverty due to the master mind of Adigalar with the co-operation of the people of Kundrakudi for whom Adigalar toiled till his last breath in 1995.28

The Annamalai University conferred on him honorary Doctorate for his outstanding service to the Society and Tamil Language on 4th December, 1989.29

Kunrakudi Adigalar and Thanthai Periyar E. V. Ramasamy

Thanthai Periyar E.V. Ramasamy paid a visit to Kunrakudi Mutt as early as 1958.30 Periyar E.V.Ramasamy was the greatest revolutionary atheist from Tamil Nadu. Though Adigalar was a believer, he was a progressive monk with a social cognition.

Both of them fought for communal reservations in education, politics and employment. According to them there should be no discrimination based on birth, untouchability should not be practised in any form in public places like roads, tanks, wells, educational

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28 Interview with AR. Lakshmanan, High Court Judge of Kerala, on 11th February 2000, at Kunrakudi.

29 Arulnambi, Tamil Valarthu Thavathiru Kunrakudi Adigalar, (Kunrakudi Adigalar and growth of Tamil language), Tamil, Good books Publications, Chennai, 1999, p.82.

30 Kumudam, a weekly Tamil Magazine of Tamil Nadu, 21st June 2004, p.78.
institutions, and choultries. They encouraged medium of instruction in mother tongue in schools and colleges and insisted that Primary education should be made compulsory and demanded that the untouchables should be provided with books, food and clothes etc., free of cost.

Adigalar founded “Thirukkural Peravai” on 11th June 1973. He conducted seminars, debates, conferences, classes etc., which were all aimed at popularising Thirukkural. According to the Vedic customs the people of all castes could not become ‘Archakas’. In order to assert the natural right of the Tamils particularly the Non – Brahmins in temples. An Act was passed by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on 12th January 1971. This Act entitled the people of all castes to become Archakas. Adigalar supported the Act when he was a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) in 197131.

Both of them were hard workers. They traveled in ordinary vehicles on poor unmotorable roads with physical pain and with great sense of forbearance.

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Mr. M. Karunanidhi, the then the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, said, that there existed a strong bond of understanding and mutual respect between the leaders of the Dravidian Movement and the pontiff. It was his friendship, which had led Adigalar to participate even in the anti-Hindi agitation in the State. It was a friendship baptised in conflict and nurtured in respect.32

**Legislator**

Adigalar became Member of Legislative Council (MLC) in 1969.33 He involved himself and participated in almost all debates of the Legislative council. He participated in the debate on The Archagar Act 1971, He insisted on the importance of Primary education, teacher and students ratio (1:30), the school libraries and rural science forum in all the educational institutions, reasonable salary for the teachers, free medical camps for all students awareness programme for medicine, development of rural housing societies and provision of housing loans, development of agriculture, use of the waste lands, development of plantation of coconut,

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mango and cashew nuts in the waste lands, the upliftment of the most backward class people in the villages.

He was always against the evil of drinking habit. He has spoken many times in the Assembly supporting prohibition of Liquor. He stressed more to develop the rehabilitation centres for the aged people, to start vocational courses like typewriting course, shorthand course and other job oriented courses in the college level.

He was elected unopposed as Panchayat President of Kunrakudi in 1990, He was the only Adheenam to be elected as the President.

Lover of Tamil Language

Adigalar was deeply interested in Tamil language and its vast treasure of literature. He emphasised that North Indians should learn one of the South Indian languages and that the South Indians should learn one of the North Indian languages. Thereby, an amicable settlement can be reached to solve the language problem.
All Civil Service examinations (I.A.S., I.P.S.,)\textsuperscript{34} should be permitted to be written in the candidates’ mother tongue itself.

In the year 1965, the Government of India announced Hindi\textsuperscript{35} as an official language. Following this announcement there arose stiff opposition to the imposition of Hindi throughout Tamil Nadu. Even though Adigalar was not hostile any to language, he opposed the compulsory imposition of Hindi.

\textbf{Village Panchayat President}

Adigalar was the most respected leader of Kunrakudi Village Panchayat. He has been recognised by his excellent activities. His way of organising the people in the Kunrakudi Village was very attractive. He was organised many schemes and organisations of the Panchayat of Kunrakudi. The way in which he organised the programmes and conducted himself had drawn the attention of all. His passiveness, understanding capacity, organizing capacity and positive attitude attracted the people. During the Panchayat Elections of 1990, he got elected unopposed. It was a great victory. The villages

\textsuperscript{34} Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service.

\textsuperscript{35} The constitution of India, Government of India article 343, 1988, p.236.
acknowledged the spirit of his dedication, elected him unopposed as their President.\textsuperscript{36}

As a President of Kunrakudi village Panchayat, Adigalar conducted meetings regularly. He considered the opinion of all Panchayat members of village and the village people. His main vision was the economic development of the Panchayat only. He conducted the meetings in the Kunrakudi Mutt. He solved the problems relating to individuals, groups and communities. In the Kunrakudi Village Adigalar took all-round efforts to develop agriculture, land development, minor irrigation, water management, watershed development, animal husbandry, dairy and poultry, rural housing, roads, culverts, waterways and other means of communications, rural electrification, poverty alleviation programmes, cultural activities, health and sanitation, family welfare, women and child development, welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular of the schedule castes, maintenance of community assets, public distribution system etc., through the village Panchayat.

\textsuperscript{36} Ooram Adigal, Saiva Adheenangal, (Saivait Mutts), Tamil, Samarasa Sunmarka Research Centre, 2003, p.507.
Conclusion

Adigalar was the familiar and popular monk amongst the Tamils because he identified himself with the people. His intense love for Tamil language, his oratorical skill and knowledge made him more popular. He was also associated various institutions (See Appendix-4)

He was not an innovator. Nevertheless he attempted to practise what he believed and preached. Though he was a spiritualist he accepted the concept of ‘classless society’. In fact he was a Gandhian and believed in ‘Social equality’. He was against exploitation in any form. He was an exponent of ‘mother tongue education’, ‘environmental protection’ and ‘prohibition’. He strongly believed in national integration, though he was an agitator against the imposition of Hindi. He was a great monk. Nevertheless, under the banner of the Mutt his indefatigable work for the socio-economic development of the people of Kunrakudi was everlasting. The socio-economic impact of the Mutt on Kunrakudi was more due to Adigalar, the head of the Mutt from 1952 to 1995.