



THEERAN CHINNAMALAI- AN ICON OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN KONGU REGION, TAMILNADU, SOUTH INDIA (1756 - 1805)

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Abstract

The research is about a great man who had contributed to the freedom struggle. He was known for his heroic deeds in the freedom Struggle, He was the DARK MAN in the history of freedom struggle of India. It was said that the great revolt of 1857 was the first to against the British but in 1800 there was a valiant Tamil man who fought three remarkable, victorious wars against British battalion.

Key Words: Theeran Chinnamalai, Freedom Struggle, Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan

Introduction

In the freedom struggle of India the role of south India were remarkable. The revolt of 1857 was considered as the first freedom struggle by the historians. The Vellore Mutiny in 1806 was considered as the first war against the Indian independence. But before those two revolts Theeran Chinnamalai in Kongu Region was the first to arise against the British. He was betrayed by his cook and hanged a year before Vellore mutiny.

Objectives:

1. To trace his background
2. To elaborate his Political agitation
3. To describe his Struggle against British

Methodology:

In the research Historical methodology and Descriptive Analysis method were followed.

Family Background

Theeran Chinnamalai belonged to the noble family Palaiya Kottai Pattakarar. This family had a title of Mandradiar and owned large fields from their palace situated at Palayam Kottai. His grandfather Kotravel Sakkarai Mandradiar adopted two children as he was childless and those children were brought up by his two wives and they were named as Senathipathi and



Rathinam. In their teenage both got married. Senathipathi, the first son took the title of Mandradiar as it was the custom in 1731. He controlled the large fields from Palayamkottai. Rathanam and his wife Periyatha shifted to Malapalayam which is north to Annur. They had six children – five sons and a daughter, namely

1. Kulandaisamy (First Son)
2. Theerthagiri (Second Son) who was called Theeran Chinnamalai
3. Thambi (Third Son)
4. Kilothar (Fourth Son)
5. Kuttiswamy (Fifth Son)
6. Parvatham (a Daughter)

Theerthagiri was the second son of his parents born in April 1756, who become later Chinnamalai. He was called as Tamba Gounder in his childhood. In school days he was called as Therthagiri Sarkarai. After attaining the school age, Chinnamala joined the fort school; Chinnamalai was more interested in studies. He was always with his pen and paper. He learned very carefully, He was the bright student in the school. He learned all Tamil poems and literature from Tamil poets.

Chinnamalai was an obedient and discipline student. He studied all the Tamil poems and their explanations very interestingly and he was more interested in learning patriotic poems. On hearing all sorts of poems from the literature such as Tolkappiyam, Iicherukappiyam, Perunkappiyam, the History of Kongu Kings, he had more patriotism to his mother language Tamil.

On seeing the interest of Chinnamalai in Tamil poems and literature, the teachers taught him about bravery act, war and rule of the Tamil Kings. They also taught him about the characters of the soldiers, how to face the soldiers in war fields and the stories of Chola, Pandiya and Chera kings. When Chinnamalai was explaining about the valor of Sengutuvan he would become as sengutuvan. When he explains about the Karikala chozhan he would become as Karikalan. The Tamil teachers prepared him as a ruler of Kongu or Kovaikone while he was at an young age

Chinnamalai decided to civilize, grow Tamil language. So after his school age when he assumed political responsibilities of Kongu region, he encouraged Tamil poets to write songs in Tamil and he gave them cash prizes. Chinnamalai's interest in learning Tamil poets made him to appreciate and help Tamil poets later on.

Ambikapathi puzhavar was a great Tamil poet. One day he came to Melapalayam. He sung a song on Chinnamalai in Tamil. Chinnamalai made the pulavar to bath in the gold. On seeing the Tamil patriotism, Ambikapathi pulavar sang more songs prizing Chinnamalai.



The first son Kulandaiswamy and the last son Kuttiswamy were attended farming and also taken charge of vast tracks of lands. The elder brother married his uncle's daughter. Kuttisamy, Chinnamalis another brother also married away from their relation. The other three brothers namely Theerthagiri, Kilothar and Thambi were taken charge of administration and safety of the villages under their control. These three were not interested in marriage life. They had no time to get married. They were more interested in work. The service to their kongu region was their duty and they thought the marriage life would disturb their social life. So the three brothers were single till their death.

Their Sister Parvatham got married to Ulagapuram Muthi Thirumalai Gounder in course of time³. The marriage was extravagant. With the marriage presents of ornaments, vessels and jewels they made their sister's life happy.

He learned Martial arts such as silambam and other sorts of arts from the malapalayam silambu koodam. Along with Chinnamalai his brothers also learned along with Chinnamalai. The three brothers rode on horses throughout their jurisdictions

They formed Kongu Youth Organization and trained the youth in Martial arts. They guard against robbers, took part in village Panchayat to solve disputes between the families and also land disputes. Because of the Public service, they were famous in their territory.

Whenever they come to home, they come with their troops which looked like a small army. They would go for hunt in Arachalur hills, when they have time. When the theeran chinnamalai and his troop come in the midnight, chinnamalais elder brother and his wife would wake up and cook food for everyone.

This continued for several days. Kambaiammal thought that was nonsense, First she complained it to her husband, Chinnmalais elder brother. But he said it was their duty to serve them..

The sister in law of Chinnamalai kambaiammal went to his father and complained about Chinnamalai and his brothers. She could not tolerate the work load in Chinnamalai's house. On hearing the cry of his daughter he decided to wreak vengeance to chinnamalai. In 1795 the three brothers including Chinnamalai went to Temple festival held in chennimalai which is nine kilometers west to Odanilai. The father in law and brother in law of Chinnamalai also came to the temple function. They decided that, that was the right situation to wreak vengeance Chinnamalai.

They ordered to their menial servant to tie chinnamalai and his brother in the wheels of chariot. When Chinnamalai and his brothers were going near the chariot, the menial servant captured them all of a sudden and tied their hand back



and tied in the wheels of chariot. On seeing that grisliness the people were mentally agitated. No one had the courage to help Chinnamalai and his brothers. The Chinnamalai's sister's husband on hearing this came with a large troop. On seeing the large troop the menial servant ran away.

All of them went to sisters home. They all were very upset on the incident. Chinnamalai did not sleep in that night. He was very much worried about that incident. He thought that it was a shame to him and his brothers. Everyone in his family said him to punish them immediately. But Chinnamalai said it was not the right situation to take revenge on them, He promised his sister that he would punish them without fail. And he was able to accomplish his promise in later years

His Political Entry

In 1672 Mysore King Thotadevaraiyar ruled the Kongu region. From that period the Kongu region came under the rule of Mysore Kingdom. In 1760 Hyder Ali becomes the King of Mysore. Hyder Ali appointed a Diwan named Mohammed Ali and a Tax Collector distressed farmers of Kongu area in collection of taxes. These officers stayed in Sangakiri fort. It was located nineteen km east from Bhavani between Salem and Bhavani. The fort was situated on the mountain, which was built by stones. The stone fort was on the top of the mountain.

The land tax of the Kongu Nadu was sent to that officer and then to Mysore King. They humiliated the farmers by confiscating their land which was their only means of livelihood.

On that period Chinnamalai was about sixteen or seventeen. He and his two brothers heard about the cruel activities of Diwan on collection of taxes, they rode on horses to challenge them in unfair tax collections. The Thandakaran, who collects tax from the people used to ride in a horse along with the land tax to snakagiri fort more often between sivanmalai and chennimalai. Chinnamalai, who was in search of Diwan, met him and his party when they were returning after tax collection, to their tents. Chinnamalai enquired him who he was. He replied that he was taking the land tax of Kongunadu to the Sangakiri fort for the King of Mysore. On hearing this Chinnamalai in angry took away all the land tax from the Thandiakaran and said him to inform the Diwan that **Chinnamalai between sivanmalai and chennimalai took away the tax.**

The Diwan in anger replied that the taxes were belonged to Hyder Ali and Chinnamalai would face serious consequences for his actions. Chinnamalai replied Diwan to inform the King of Mysore that the land tax was their own money and they need not to pay tax to any of the outside king and the Kongu regions belong to them. They can rule their region by themselves. The Diwan



was stunned on the reply of the Chinnamalai. His conflict between Mysore King's Diwan expanded like wild fire. Peoples of Kongu Tamil felt glad and named as "Chinnamalai" for his courage.

As a result, Diwan sent a group of soldiers from Sankagiri to attack Chinnamalai as revenge. Chinnamalai and his brave soldiers met them on their way to Kangayam at the Noyyal River. This was the first revenge experienced by Chinnamalai in the battle field and defeated them. He was ready with his brave soldiers from all the villages because he knew that he had to meet Hyder Ali in the battle. The new Kongu warriors were trained Martial arts by him. He did not have an official rank of a ruler but he became a very strong figure in the Kongu region.

After the death of Hyder Ali in the year 1782, Tippu Sultan came to power in Mysore. He had disputes with the British. Theeran Chinnamalai along with his troops and brother joined the Tippu's army. He became the captain of the infantry. After becoming the captain he collected all the Kongu soldiers trained them with all sort of exercise and also propagated the patriotism, courage, valor to the soldiers. The courageous fight of Kongu troop was the main reason for the triumph in war against the British troop with more than forty thousand soldiers in the Mavalli Region.

They also effectively fought in the war held in Thirivarnga patinam but the British won the war in unfair condition. In 1799 Tippu died in the Thiruvarangapattinam war around most critical situation. The Thiruvarangapattinam came under the rule of British. All the Mysore battalion scattered in four sides. But many soldiers were caught by the British and all were arrested.

Chinnamalai knew well that British would capture the Mysore Palace so he gathered his entire Kongu troop and went towards the River Cauvery in the south. The British followed them to a long distance but the Chinnamalai and his troop passed the River Cauvery and reached the mountain in the southern region. The mountain region was full of bushes and the British could not trace them and they returned back. The Kovai troop reached the Kongu Region. Chinnamalai went to Ariyapat. He hanged the head of his father in law and brother in law in a tamarind tree.

In the fourth Mysore war on 4th May 1799 Tippu died. Chinnamalai came back to his native place, Odanilai and built a fort and he decided to face the British troops by himself.

After returning from the Mysore Chinnamalai was more active and more vigorous in the Politics of Kovai Region. Chinnamalai planned to gather all the palayalkars. The rebel mission led by Chinnamalai to get the support of Dhoondaji Waugh who was called the 'First Mission to Kannada Rebels'. Four patriots led by Chinnamalai visited Dhoondaji Waugh at Sonnda.



The Patriots under Chinnmalai explained the repressive and suppressive activities of the British and insisted Dhoondaji Waugh to send his agents to Erode to motivate the people for revolt. As a sequence, Dhoondaji Waugh sent three of his confidential agents with Chinnamalai to the south and directed them to take guidance from Chinnamalai in the organized revolt in Coimbatore, Erode and Madurai areas. Thus Chinnamalai was first to make attempts to forge unity among the native rebels in Erode region to succeed and oust the enemies.

Kovai Revolt:

Cornel Maxixster was the head of the Kovai Fort. They decided to capture the Kovai fort. In 1800 June 3rd on Moharam day Chinnamalai decided to start Kovai revolution they also decided to destroy the fifth regiment of British cavalry that garrisoned the fort the Kovai revolution.

He especially fixed the revolt on Moharam because it was the Muslim festival so all the Muslim soldiers would be absent. Before a month of the revolt, from the date was fixed, all the warriors disguised and camped at kovai.

Kovai Narchinga Rao arranged all the facilities to the warriors. Chinnamalai was informed continuously by outsiders. Osur Patthamohammed Eachipattai Ronon Ullakhan, along with 4000 mounted soldiers' Kani Ja Khan Dindugal Lakkama Naicker, Verupacchai Gopalanaicker all stepped towards Kovai. Poondurai Varanasi Erode Vallai Gownder, Perundurai Kumaravellai, Aravakurachi Periya Thambi also camped. The warriors were hidden in Maniya Karapalayam Ganapathi, Saravanapati, Perur, Ramanathapuram, Puliyakulam, Pulaimedu (Peelamedu). There was no information or the battalions were not reached from Mardhupandiyar, Dhoondaji Waugh. Anyhow chinnamalai decided to start the revolt as already planned.

Kovai fort was spied. At Coimbatore, a body of rebels 500 to 600 made their appearance. Led by one Narasing Bhao, the insurgents were sheltered at strategic places in the town. On receiving secret information from a Tahsildar the British smelt the rebel activities and acted swiftly upon. Narasing Bhao and six others were arrested. Forty two rebels were captured, put to trail and were publicly executed.

Though carefully planned and elaborately organized, the plot proved abortive. Had they acted according to the scheduled time, they would have won in their attempt. Despite the initial setback at Coimbatore, the patriots carried on the struggle unabated.

The British after crushing the revolt decided to arrest Theeran Chinnamalai. They conducted war against Theeran Chinnamalai in 1801, 1802, 1804 in which Theeran Chinnamalai had a great victory against the British. He cut the head of carnal Maxwell and painted black and yellow and showed to nook and corner of the Kongu Region.



The British were annoyed. They understood that it was difficult to face him directly. They planned to defeat Theeran Chinnamalai cunningly. They decided to attack the Odanilai fort suddenly. But their plan was informed to Chinnamalai through Velappan, the British sepoy. Velappan was hanged later by the British. Chinnamalai and his brothers settled in Karumalai near Palanimalai with the Cook Nallapan. Cook Nallapan betrayed Chinnamalai and informed the British about their stay. The British surrounded them and arrested. Theeran Chinnamalai and his Brother were hanged on the August 18th [adi peruku]

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