

உய்யுள்ள காலகாலம், சீரற்றவாழ்வுகளைக் கொண்டுவந்து கொடுக்கும்  
 உய்யுள்ள காலகாலம், உய்யுள்ள அனுபவம் தரும் உய்யுள்ள அனுபவம்  
 உய்யுள்ள காலகாலம்

- லொர்டி விமேகாந்தி

"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling,  
 but in rising every time we fall".

- Nelson Mandela

"Science knows no country, because knowledge  
 belongs to humanity, and is the torch which  
 illuminates the world".

- Louis Pasteur



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**மாநாடு வளர்ச்சியில் இலக்கிய, சமூகவியல்  
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 ROLE OF LITERATURE, SOCIOLOGY AND  
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 (INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE)**



பதிப்பாளர்கள்  
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 குகாசாமி க. பங்காசாமி  
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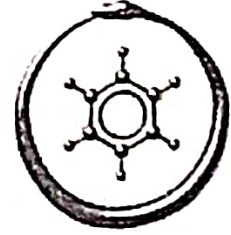
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## CHAKKARAI CHETTIAR - AN UNSUNG SWADESHI MILITANT NATIONALIST OF TAMILNADU

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### Abstract

Nationalism in India was originating indifferent parts of India at different points of time. Hence, the tamilnadu has the hoary tradition of fighting for justice, rights and fair – play. True to tradition, the people of tamilnadu rose in revolt when their cherished rights were threatened, throttled and violated by the English East India Company. But, the uniqueness of the Nationalist Movement in Tamilnadu was due to the Swadeshi and boycott ideology. The fire of Swadeshi movement, started in Bengal, soon spread to Tamilnadu. They encouraged boycott of foreign cloth and products and supported Swadeshi goods. This was the great ideology and supported by VOC and other accompanied nationalist. One among them was Chakkarai Chettiar. He also played a pivotal role in the Swadeshi Movement in Tamilnadu. In this regard, this paper express briefly about how he joined in the national movement especially Swadeshi movement in tamilnadu.

**Key Words :** Nationalism, Swadeshi, boycott ideology, justice.

### Introduction

The word 'Swadeshi' denotes use of goods made in one's own country. The boycott of foreign made goods and the promotion of indigenous enterprise are the twin pillars of the Swadeshi movement. This Movement gave a great change in the history of freedom struggle. It gave concrete and determined objectives which comprised of economic and political ideology. Swadeshi and its boycott programmes were clarified definite shape to freedom struggle. The Swadeshi Movement spread throughout India. But the British Government did not expect such an agitation. It promoted the various activities in Madras Presidency also. The Swadeshi Movement produced many selfless patriots like G. Subramanialyer, V.O.C., Bharathi.

Dr. Nanjunda Rao, Subramania Siva, Neelakanda Brahmchari, etc.. Among them Chakkarai Chettiar was a noteworthy and a committed Swadeshi nationalist of Tamilnadu.

### Early life

Chakkarai Chettiar was born to Kesava Chettiar and Aandal Ammal on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1878 in Chennai and the man who created the first labour union in Madras Presidency. His ancestors belonged to the village of Vengal near Thiruvallur which is adjacent to Chennai. In his young age, Chakkarai Chettiar was taught by his grandmother to affiliate to religion, be disciplined and respect their culture. He received an English medium education in a Scottish mission school and later entered the esteemed Madras Christian College to study philosophy. When he was in this college the Chakkarai came under the influence of its president, William Miller. A significant figure in the advancement of education in late nineteenth century India, William Miller would prove to be a formidable figure in Chakkarai's journey. Then viceroy of India, Lord Curzon once talked to the students of the Christian college. As the student president, Chakkarai Chettiar delivered the vote of thanks. By his oratory skills in English Lord Curzon told the college principle Dr. Miller "Who is this youngster who talks such good English? He will become a great orator in the future". After that he completed degree in Law and began working as a solicitor in Madras in 1908. In the year 1910 Chakkarai Chettiar married a woman named Senjulakshmi. Because of his unquenched interest in Tamil he came in contact with Maraimalai Adigal. He was also a close friend of the poet Bharathiyar. In 1922, Chakkarai Chettiar penned the introduction for the book Swadesha Geethangal by Bharathiyar. Two interesting developments occurred during this time of Chakkarai's life. The first was a desire to help with evangelism among educated Hindus. This led Chakkarai to leave his law practice and join the Danish Missionary Society (DMS) in Madras where he served from 1913 to 1921. The second development was Chakkarai's increasing involvement in India's independence movement. After volunteering briefly with B.G. Tilak's Home Rule League in 1917, Chakkarai found his chief political hero in M.K. Gandhi and became actively involved with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921. After some time, Chakkarai left the DMS and in 1924, he was elected as a counselor of the city of Madras where he served until 1948. He maintained close friendship with Tamil Thendral Thiru V. Kalyamasundaram, C.P. Ramasamy Ayyar and E. V. R. Periyar.

### Political life

He started his public life by joining the Congress party. He worked as the secretary of the Madras city's congress committee. In 1907 he attended

the Surat session of Congress with V.O.Chidambaram, SubramaniyaAyyar and Bharathi. In this session of Congress there arose difference between the Moderates and Extremists on the issue of choosing the leader. The extremists headed by Thilak put forth Lala Lajpat Rai as the leader. But the moderates headed by DadabhaiNaoroji elected Rash BehariGhosh of Kolkata as their leader. Men from Chennai- Chakkarai Chettiar, V.O.C, and Bharathiyar joined Thilak's faction in this session. Joining with these three in those days were Srinivasacharya, SurendranathArya and P.Thirumalachari who worked to strengthen the nationalist movement in Chennai. For this purpose they formed the Chennai Jan Sangh. In the month of May in 1907 this Sangh brought Bipin Chandra Pal to Chennai where he was made to address numerous gatherings. Chakkarai Chettiar's role in politics kept growing. When Gandhi started his Non Cooperation movement Chakkarai Chettiar worked with Rajaji, E.V.R. Krishnasamy Sharma and Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram for this cause. Chakkarai Chettiar took active part in organizing the protests in Chennai against the Rowlatt Act, JallianwalaBagh massacre and the boycotting of the visit by Prince of Wales. As he was also the leader of the labour union he was able to mobilize the workers for the non-cooperation movement.

In November 15-16 of the year 1924 the Congress party's convention was held in Thiruvanamalai. Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram headed this convention. A resolution was taken that the Congress party will take part in the assembly elections. Chakkarai Chettiar, who took part in this convention, was in favour of this resolution.

In 1927 Chakkarai Chettiar came out of the Congress and joined the Justice Party. Later he contested in the parliamentary elections as a Justice Party candidate against S.SrinivasaAyyangar of the Congress Party. It is said that he revealed the reason for leaving the Congress Party to his relatives to be the lack of internal democracy within the party and the oppression against the younger generation carried out by the older leaders of the party. His journey with the Justice Party was short lived. He came out of the Justice Party on August 21st 1928. Thereafter he did not join any other political party.

He played an important role in forming and guiding the labour union in Chennai's B&C Mills. Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram and Selvapathi Chettiar assisted Chakkarai Chettiar in the formation of the Union. In 1917 Selvapathi Chettiar was the General Secretary of the VenkateshaGunamruthaVarshini Sabha. There was a separate section for workers in this Sabha. When a meeting of this section took place in 1917 on Vijayadasami there was a talk given by N.C.Kannabhiran Mudaliar on the topic 'Vaishnavism'. More than

20 workers took part in this meeting. They discussed about the state of the workers. In those days festival holidays were scarce and workers were expected to work for 12 hours a day. To compensate for certain holidays on festivals workers were expected to work on Sundays. These issues were discussed during this meeting and it was decided that it was necessary to form a labour Union in order to negotiate these issues with the owners.

In light of this decision Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram, Chakkarai Chettiar and P.Kesavanpillai were approached and were asked to head the Union. In those days, Kesavanpillai used to write about the torments of the workers in the English daily 'Indian Patriot'. He also wrote about the state of workers in the B&C Mills. When asked to take up the leadership of the union he refused on the ground that he was not a permanent resident of Chennai. Later Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram and Chakkarai Chettiar approached B.P.Wadia of the Theosophical Society. Soon the Madras Labour Union was started with B.P.Wadia as the President, Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram and Chakkarai Chettiar as Vice Presidents and Selvapathi Chettiar and Ramanajalu as Secretaries. Following this MSM Railway Workers Union, Tramway Workers Union and kerosene workers Union were formed in 1919. The leaders who guided these Unions were mostly Congress Party leaders. Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaram, Chakkarai Chettiar, E.L.Ayyar, V.O.Chidambaram, KasturiRengaAyyangar and M.S.SubramaniyaAyyar were all men who had worked with the Congress party. Therefore the protests headed by these men were not merely for the demands of the workers but were also nationalist protests against the British colonialism.

### Conclusion

Tamil Nadu played a significant role in the Swadeshi Movement from 1905 to 1912. The prominent Swadeshi leaders like V.O.C.Pillai, Subramania Bharathi, Subramania Siva, V.V.S.Aiyar, Vanchi Aiyar, Neelakandan, Parali Nellaiappar, Madasamy Pillai, Madathukadai Chidambaram Pillai, Sankara Krishna Iyer, Padmanabhalyangar and Hariharalyer involved themselves in a consistent way during the Swadeshi Movement and they also exhibited their anti-British sentiments in a deep way by participate each and every activity of the Swadeshi leaders. Apart from these prominent leaders the Chakkarai Chettiar was one among the person who learnt law, was well versed in Tamil and English, one who fought for the welfare of workers, member of the corporation, Mayor, Upper House Member and so on. He struggled for the working population throughout his life. Though he did not join the Communist Party, he enjoyed a close relation with it. He maintained close friendship with Communist Leaders like S.A. Dange, E.M.S.Namboodripad, A.S.K. P. Ramamoorthy and K.T.K. Thangamani. Chakkarai Chettiar died on

June 1958 at the age of 82. The life of Chakkarai Chettiar stands as an example for all those who fight for the rights of the proletariat.

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