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**THE ROLE OF TAMIL NEWSPAPERS IN THE POLITICAL
AWARENESS OF INDIANS AND THE FORMATION OF
MALAYAN INDIAN CONGRESS (MIC), 1946**

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The Role of Tamil Newspapers in the Political Awareness of Indians and the Formation of Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), 1946

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Abstract

This paper looks at the role of Tamil newspapers particularly Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam in the rise of political awareness of Indians in Malaya which led to the formation of MIC in 1946. Tamil newspapers published in Malaya had impacted the political development of Indians in Malaya. This paper examines how the Tamil newspapers played a role in influencing the Indian leaders to be actively involved in Malayan politics to fight for the rights of Indians in Malaya. Moreover, it reveals the role of Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam behind the gaining of support of Indians and give them the confidence to accept MIC as a national body that could protect the interests of Indians in Malaya. All news, opinions and suggestions made by the Tamil newspapers led to the formation of MIC in August, 1946 with the efforts of John Thivy.

Keywords: Role, Tamil newspapers, political awareness, Malayan Indian Congress

Biodata

Dr.Ganesan Shanmugavelu has completed his Ph.D in Malaysian History entitled 'Akhbar-Akhbar Tamil dan Pemikiran Tentang Kaum India di Tanah Melayu, 1946 – 1960' (Tamil Newspapers and Their Thinking on Indians in Malaya, 1946 – 1960) from the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang. He has published his research papers in various national journals in Malaysia and also presented his research papers in various national and international conferences. His research interest is on the socio-economic and political development of Indians in Malaysia. He works as a senior lecturer with Institute of Teacher Education Ipoh Campus, Malaysia. He can be contacted at E-Mail : ganesan.s@ipgm.edu.my or drganesan68@gmail.com

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Dr. Ganesan Shanmugavelu

Introduction

Indians have had historical relations with the Malayan peninsula and thereby comprised a considerable part in the racial composition of Malaya. The name Malaya was changed to Malaysia after the formation of Malaysia on 16th September 1963. Indians came to Malaya in large numbers during the British occupation. According to K.S.Sandhu, the period of modern Indian migration into Malaya dates from the foundation of Penang in 1786, but it became a significant feature in Malayan demography only in the later half of the 19th century following the consolidation of British power in Malaya. (K.S.Sandhu, 1969: 31)

Since coming to Malaya, the advent of Indians in Malaya, especially during the colonial period, impacted their lives in a big way, be it socially, economically or politically. This manifested in the formation of a group identity among them, which in turn, led to the rise of the middle class among the Indians. This rising middle class was instrumental in giving voice to the various concerns of the community and making use of the print media was one of them.

Tamil newspaper was first published in Malaya towards the end of the 19th century and went on growing rapidly in the 20th century. Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam were three such popular newspapers among the Indians in Malaya. In fact, these played an important role in addressing the issues of the Indians, most important being political issues. Needless to say, this contributed significantly to the political development of

Indian community in Malaya. Tamil Nesan was first published on 10th September, 1924 by Narasimha Iyengar. To date, this newspaper is still being published. Tamil Murasu was first published on 6th July, 1935 by G.Sarangapani. This newspaper is still in publication in Singapore. Jananayakam was published on 28th September, 1945 by Subramaniam Iyer. This newspaper ceased publication on 1st October, 1950.

It's interesting to note that while the presence of Indians on the Malayan soil could be attributed solely to the economic necessities of the time, in the context of nineteenth century, yet their entry into politics was unmistakably evident. The political awareness of Indians in Malaya in the beginning was instilled with nationalist fervour, especially to gain independence for India from British colonisation. After the Second World War, the political awareness of the Indians began to experience changes, when they began to fight for political rights and engaged in political developments in Malaya.

The shifting of political awareness among Indians in Malaya caused by the thoughts and the roles played by Tamil newspapers, such as Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam began to influence the Indian leaders to broaden their scope of work and thereby, engage in local politics, particularly in raising political awareness and trigger political ideas amongst the local Indians. This drive to raise political as well as social awareness eventually made way for the Indian leaders to form the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in 1946. It is to be noted that the formation of MIC was also

strongly influenced by the role of Tamil newspapers that gave a positive response to the proposal to form MIC. All reports and news about the formation of MIC published in the Tamil newspapers, especially Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam, allowed the Indians to get detailed information and to support the formation of MIC.

Development of Political Consciousness among Indians

Political consciousness among Indians in Malaya at the beginning was related to the political developments taking place in India. This might be attributed to the fact that, the majority of the Indians regarded Malaya as a temporary residence. The British also played a role in discouraging the Indians to fight for their rights to identity in Malaya itself. Political awareness among Indians in Malaya began to exist after the politically oriented movement namely 'Ghadar Movement' burst onto the national scene in 1913, based in North America. (Harish K.Puri, 1983: 2). The Ghadar movement's propaganda focused mainly on the North Indian community, particularly the police and the sepoys while leaders like Bholanath Chatterji had instilled the spirit of revolution among the Indians in Malaya. (Khoo Kay Kim, 1973: 18). Moreover, Indians in Malaya were also influenced by another political movement of India in 1919 that is the Khilafat Movement. (Praba Dixit, 1974: 66-69). The movement was founded in India by two brothers namely Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali in response to attempts by the British to divide the Turkish Empire after the First World War. (Gail Pinault, 1982: 72-79).

Although Indians were more interested in the political developments taking place in India, they however, also felt the need for some form of association to unite and strengthen their relationships with each other in Malaya. Consequently, some social associations were established in the cities and districts since 1900. (S.Arasaratnam, 1967: 107) Among the associations that were set up, the most notable were the Taiping Indian Association, Kinta Indian Association, Selangor Indian Association, Klang Indian Association, Penang

Indian Association, Malacca Indian Association, Negeri Sembilan Indian Association and the Singapore Indian Association. (S.Arasaratnam, 1970: 82-90 & Khoo Kay Kim, 1995: 218-249). As, A.Rajeswary puts it, the diverse nature of the Indian community in Malaya, divided along class, caste and ethnic lines, prevented the development of Indian cohesive political force among the Malayan Indians. Moreover, these divisions ensured that political impulses from the varying regions of India affected only the corresponding ethnic and religious group in Malaya and not the Indian community as a whole. (A.Rajeswary, 1969: 2-3)

These Indian Associations were led by none other than the upper and middle class, comprising of the English educated Indians. Almost all members of these associations were made up of businessmen, professionals, Tamil school teachers, priests, monks, and also had the support of officials from the public and private sectors. (S.Arasaratnam, 1970: 83). These associations acted as a center of social activity for the Indians and its members were very loyal to the British because most of them were government servants.

The political awareness of Indians in Malaya peaked in the 1930s because at this time the Indians began to see Malaya as their place of permanent residence and as M.R.Stenson states, they came to realize that they must unite and act together to fight for the same social, economic and political rights with the other communities in Malaya. This allowed the formation of the Central Indian Association Of Malaya (CIAM) in 1936. (M.R.Stenson, 1980: 45)

The formation of CIAM was an important turning point in the awareness and political development of Indians in Malaya. CIAM is a combination of 12 associations and 4 Indian Business Council. According to S.Arasaratnam, CIAM was the first Indian organization which carried out political activity as one of its declared aims. (S.Arasaratnam, 1970: 99) The establishment of CIAM also can be seen as an important development in the history of Indians in Malaya.

During the Japanese occupation of Malaya (1941 - 1945), the Japanese tried to mobilize the communities in Malaya to play an important role in the local political arena and the Japanese focused exclusively on Indians. Issues on independence of India was used to impart anti-British sentiment among Indians in Malaya to gain their support against the British military and its allies in India and Burma.

The Japanese used the Indian Independence League (IIL) and the Indian National Army (INA) under the leadership of Subash Chandra Bose to get the support of Indians. Both of these organizations played an important role during the Japanese Occupation with the goal of liberating India from British colonial rule. Japanese slogan of "Asia for Asia" generated anti-British sentiments among radical Indian nationalist in Malaya.

After the Second World War, the political awareness of Indians entered a new phase with more radical political ideas. With the lack of charismatic local leaders among them, the Indians seemed less interested in local politics and they were aware of the political developments in India. This can be seen in the participation of Indians in the Indian National Army. According to A.Rajeswary, by July 1944, nearly half the number of Indians in Malaya joined the Indian National Army. (A.Rajeswary, 1981 : 8). The existing leaders were more concerned on strengthening the loyalty of Indians in Malaya to Indian National Congress (INC). For example, the President of the Committee for Protection of Selangor Indians, Swami Athmaram in a speech urged Indian youths to unite under the INC and be active in politics. (Jananayakam, 24 January 1946). After the Second World War, it was the Tamil newspapers that were more instrumental in the rise of political awareness of Indians in Malaya. In this case, the Tamil newspapers focused exclusively on political developments by publishing reports and political news from India and Malaya.

Role and Representation of Malayan Indian politics in Tamil Newspapers

To begin with, the anniversary celebration of INC received widespread coverage in the Jananayakam. The reports briefed on the specifics of celebration along with the speeches of the local Indian leaders calling on Indians in Malaya to engage actively in politics, in order to free India from British rule. (Jananayakam, 7 January 1946) In this regard, A. Rajeswary further confirmed that, the relationship between the Indian nationalists in Malaya and the nationalists in India was a symbiotic one, for while the former sought to seek the aid of India in improving conditions in Malaya, the latter sought to mobilize the support of overseas Indians in India's freedom struggle. (A.Rajeswary, 1969: 61)

The anniversary of INC is celebrated with a procession by Indians which was held in Klang. In this regard, the Jananayakam played a role by issuing a declaration which called on all Indians to participate in the parade and raise the INC flag at their homes. (Jananayakam, 12 January 1946). The Jananayakam's call was accepted by Indians and on January 21, 1946, nearly all Indians in Klang raised the INC flag. (Jananayakam, 21 January 1946)

The attitudes and political awareness of Indians became more apparent and could be seen in the swearing-in ceremony to fight for the independence of India. Jananayakam reported that Indians living around Kuala Lumpur were preparing to take the oath at the Indian Youth Association building, Sentul on 26 January 1946 as how the people in India did on the same day. (Jananayakam, 25 January 1946). Additionally, the greeting 'Jai Hind' and also singing the national anthem of India is a must in every Indian meeting and conferences at that time. Accordingly the Indian youths will greet 'Jai Hind' when meeting with other Indian people.

It is clear that, the Indians in Malaya at that time had lofty sentiments towards India and still regarded themselves as citizens of India and they needed to demonstrate their loyalty and responsi-

bility to India. The Indian leaders in Malaya including Tamil newspapers also incite the spirit of India's political wing. Jananayakam for instance condemned the United Nations for not decisive in the independence of India and also warned that the Indians in Malaya are ready to fight and sacrifice for the independence of India. (Jananayakam, 26 January 1946)

The political awareness of Indians in Malaya began to change by Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Malaya in March, 1946. It was regarded as a turning point so much so that according to S. Subramaniam, Pandit Nehru's visit to Malaya in March 1946, was explicitly to 'afford psychological relief' to his countrymen. His speeches at mass rallies provided this assurance and boosted Indian morale considerably. (Subramaniam, 1973: 8)

Nehru's visit to Malaya on March 18, 1946 received widespread coverage in the local newspapers, especially Tamil newspapers. During the visit, Nehru delivered speeches in the places he visited, including in Singapore and his speeches were published as the lead news in Tamil newspapers. (Tamil Murasu, Jananayakam & Tamil Nesan, 18 March 1946 to 27 March 1946).

Nehru's arrival boosted the spirit of the Indians and they welcomed Nehru with INC party flags. Indians also submitted appeals and asked Nehru to find a solution to all problems faced by Indians in Malaya, but Nehru did not directly touch on these matters in his speech. (Jananayakam, 19 March 1946). This situation resulted in the Indians feeling frustrated and Jananayakam commented by saying that the visit would be meaningless if Nehru did not show interest in the problems of Indians in Malaya. (Jananayakam, 22 March 1946). At the same time, the British in Malaya showed discontent over the visit of Nehru to Malaya. When Nehru applied for permission to visit Malaya, Assistant Senior Public Affairs Officer, Alexander Newbould authorized the visit, on the condition that Nehru would not use his visit for political interests. Besides that, the British warned Nehru that Britain had already designed plans to solve the problems faced by all communities in Malaya

and Nehru was asked to cooperate with the British in this matter. (BMA File 8/19: January 1946) The pressure by British, caused Nehru, to avoid getting involved in the unrest and problems that occurred in Malaya. Accordingly, Nehru stated that India at that time was governed by the British which went on to imply that British alone was responsible for improving the quality of life of Indians in Malaya. (Jananayakam, 25 March 1946)

In the meantime, Nehru also advised the Indians to live in harmony and work with other races in Malaya for the interests and prosperity of the country. He also reminded the Indians to show loyalty to Malaya and to defend their rights and ask the Indians not to worry about the political developments taking place in India (Jananayakam & Tamil Murasu, 19 March 1946). Nehru also stressed that the Indians in Malaya should not depend on India for any help but instead, have to demand help and other facilities from the Malayan government itself. (Jananayakam & Tamil Murasu, 20 March 1946)

Moreover, Nehru also advised Indians to establish good relationship with the other races in Malaya and do not make unreasonable demands. Nehru also pointed out that, after independence, India will not send troops to foreign countries including Malaya to protect the rights of Indians in there. (Jananayakam, 26 March 1946)

It should be noted here that, the visit by Nehru, despite everything, raised the political awareness of the Indians in Malaya and it goes without saying that the credit indirectly goes to the Tamil newspapers such as, Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam for publishing all speeches, messages and requests made by Nehru during his stay in Malaya.

The reports in Tamil newspapers also raised awareness about local politics among Indians living in the rubber plantations that rely on Tamil newspapers to get the latest information and events that occur in Malaya. In addition, the rise of local political awareness among the Tamil elites in Malaya, allowed them to think about the future of the Indians in Malaya. In fact, the role of Tamil

newspapers during Nehru's visit, to some extent had increased the awareness and raise the spirits of Indians in Malaya to be active in political organizations.

The Indians in Malaya were more focused on political developments in India. According to S. Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaya were still strong in the spirit of their country of origin, resulting in more focus being given to Indian national politics than local politics. (S. Arasaratnam, 1970: 108-110). However, this awareness began to change when the political scenario in Malaya changed and had a profound impact on the population in Malaya after World War II. Accordingly, Tamil Murasu discussed a lot of political issues in its editorials. Tamil Murasu often voiced its displeasure against the privileges granted to any single race, whilst Tamil Murasu suggested that all communities in Malaya be given the same treatment. (Tamil Murasu, 25 January 1947, 4 and 8 January 1948)

Additionally, Tamil Murasu also stressed that, most Indians did not agree with the proposed constitutional changes to Malaya. The newspaper also urged Indians to express their views to the government through rallies. (Tamil Murasu, 25 January 1947). In the meantime, Tamil Murasu stated that, the failure in political developments in Malaya was caused by the practice of communal politics. Tamil Murasu protested race-based politics and suggested the formation of a national organization that was not based on race to create a Malaya based national consciousness. (Tamil Murasu, 4 January 1949)

In this case, Tamil Murasu also wanted the Indians to be aware and be more sensitive to the political changes that were occurring in Malaya. Tamil Murasu always make a comparison between Malaya and other countries that had many Indians who migrated from India. Tamil Murasu has warned the Indians to learn from the experiences of Indians in Burma, Sri Lanka and South Africa as well as requiring them to be aware that the political situation in Malaya will be different after British left Malaya. (Tamil Murasu, 1 January 1949)

In addition, in one of the editorial titled 'Importance of Politics', Tamil Murasu warned a group of Indian leaders who continued to bring Indian politics to Malaya as claimed by a group of Indian leaders to impose Hindi language for all Indians as Hindi is the national language in India. Tamil Murasu explained that, government has been tolerant, but efforts such as these are inappropriate and the government will take action in the future. (Tamil Murasu, 14 May 1949)

In order to create awareness among the Indians on local politics in Malaya, Tamil Murasu had also taken steps to pay more leverage to report news from India. This changes could be seen in Tamil Murasu in the early 1950s. (Tamil Murasu, January - April 1950) The move aimed that, Indians become more sensitive to local political developments and show interest in local issues in Malaya. All the efforts by Tamil Murasu in creating awareness among the Indians in the political developments in Malaya was to therefore, ensure that they were ready to face whatever hardships came their way in future to control the freedom they had right now under the colonial administration. It was important that the Indian leaders learnt to cope with any political situation in Malaya in the future. For this purpose, Tamil Murasu urged the Indian leaders to change and concentrate on local politics so that they can safeguard the interests of Indians in Malaya.

The Tamil Print Media and the Formation of Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) - 1946

After the Second World War in 1945, the Malayan situation underwent certain changes. This can be seen in the political, economic and social developments. By this time, British re-established their rule over Malaya – the British Military Administration (BMA) from September 1945 to March 1946. (Mohamed Amin & Caldwell, 1977 : 120 – 149). Meanwhile, the Indians, especially the labourers, came to be increasingly influenced by more radical political ideas. This can be attributed to the fact that, despite the BMA administration being assisted by an 'Advisory Council', it failed to establish an effective administration to revive

the economy of Malaya. This led to the Indian labourers in the estate to suffer and thereafter, become more extreme and militant, with support from the left-wing group. The people in Malaya, especially the Malays and the Chinese began their efforts to unify themselves respectively, under one association. This awareness arose to protect their interests and rights in Malaya.

The BMA administration had taken action on IIL and INA officials, detaining them on charges of treason. At least 752 former INA members and 97 Indian civilians were detained on various charges. (M.R.Stenson, 1980: 141). As a consequence, many of the Indian leaders isolated themselves from Malayan politics. Besides that, INA officers were sent to India for investigation and most of them returned to India. (S.Arasaratnam, 1970: 112)

In order to protect the Indians who were arrested by the BMA, in early 1946, the Government of India sent a panel consisting of five lawyers namely K.Bashyam, K.F.Nariman, P.N.Sapru, K.S.Dongre and R.Venkataraman. (G.Netto, 1961: 63) After the debate between the panel and the BMA, BMA decided to take action against IIL and INA officials involved in criminal activity and violence only. (Malaya Tribune, 18 January 1946). This allowed some Indian leaders to be released such as John Thivy, V.J.Somasundram, Swami Satyananda and Dr.N.K.Lukshumy (M.Usha, 1973: 218-219) The decision made by BMA enabled Indian political leaders to re-engage in the political arena of Malaya.

The Developments that occurred during the Second World War and the involvement of Indians in IIL and INA brought about awareness to local Indian leaders to unite the Indians. They also felt the need for a solid and strong leadership to voice their views and to fight for the rights of Indians in Malaya. As such, they required an association representing the entire Indian community in Malaya.

Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Malaya in March, 1946 mobilized the Indian leaders to form an organization to represent the Indians in Malaya. During

his visit, Nehru had urged Indian leaders to unite the Indians so that they can play a more important role in Malayan politics. Nehru's speeches had raised the spirit of nationalism among the Indians in Malaya. (Indian Daily Mail, 19 March 1946). Nehru also urged John Thivy, one of the most influential leader of the time to get the support of Indian labourers who were affected by communist propaganda. This situation allowed the Indian leaders to focus on local politics and the Indians also wanted an organization to protect their interests and welfare in Malaya. These developments led to the formation of Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in 1946. The name Malayan Indian Congress was used from 1946 to 1963. After the formation of Malaysia on 16th September 1963, the name was changed to Malaysian Indian Congress.

John Thivy is the son of Louis Thivy who founded the CIAM in 1936. John Thivy was born in Ipoh, Perak. He was educated in Ipoh, Madras and London. He graduated with a law degree. John Thivy is not new in the political arena. He was active in INA during the Japanese occupation and was a minister in the exile government of Subash Chandra Bose in Singapore between 1943 - 1944. His experience led him to be active in Malayan politics. John Thivy is the first President of MIC.

Indian leaders realized that, most organizations that have already been formed, had certain political objectives and these organizations certainly would not end their struggle until there was no one organization that would turn out to be better and convincing. (Draft Proposal, All Malayan Indian Organisation). In this condition, the best action to be taken was to hold a conference to discuss the constitution and objectives of the organization that will be formed.

The effort to establish a national body that can represent all Indians in Malaya was first voiced by John Thivy, a month after Nehru's visit to Malaya. (Tamil Murasu, Jananayakam & Tamil Nesan, 18 March 1946). He had proposed this idea at a meeting of the Selangor Indian Association (SIA) held on 18 April 1946, stating that the Indians need a national body that can concentrate the energy of

Indians so that they can work with other races and can determine their future in Malaya. (Jananayakam, 20 April 1946). In an interview with Malay-
an Daily News, John Thivy said that:

“It is the duty of Indians not only to safeguard their interests and guide the government in regard to their varied problems, but also to help Malay democratic towards her goal. This they can only do it if they have the leadership which will afford them the opportunity to work constructively, conjointly with other communities. Such a leadership can only be found in the establishment of a single organization for all Indians in Malaya. To ensure popular support and a firm formation, the people must decide upon the formation it will have to take and its objective “. (Malayan Daily News, 19 April 1946)

The idea put forward by John Thivy received a positive response from the Tamil newspapers. The Jananayakam welcomed the idea of John Thivy as timely initiative. Jananayakam had asked the Indians not to misuse and misinterpret this idea as attempts by any party to seize power. Jananayakam also stressed that, in view of the developments that occurred in Malaya that time, the need to have one national body for Indians was very important and a must for safeguarding the interests of Indians in Malaya. (Jananayakam, 20 April 1946). The Tamil Nesan also expressed support for the idea to form MIC and urged the Indian community to support the sincere efforts of John Thivy. (Tamil Nesan, 21 June and 26 July 1946). The support and encouragement by Tamil Nesan and Jananayakam allowed John Thivy to intensify efforts to form MIC.

However, the Indian community's response to the idea of establishing a national body was deeply divided. On one hand, support for the idea of establishing a national body came from the Tamil youths of the estate. Interestingly, their support to Thivy's idea was manifested through editorial letters in Tamil newspapers. They expressed their views and also warned against discouraging

or disturbing the efforts by John Thivy. (Jananayakam, 25 April 1946)

John Thivy garnered strong support from the Tamil youths because they thought of him as a progressive Tamil leader and they believed that as a leader of the Tamils, he will strive to improve socio-economic conditions of Tamil labourers in the estates because the Indian leaders at that time were not interested in the welfare of the labourers in the estate. This allowed the youths from the estate to support the idea of John Thivy and expected him to bring changes to the leadership of Indians in Malaya. (Jananayakam, 26 & 27 April 1946)

In the meantime, the idea by John Thivy also faced opposition from certain groups. Among them was social associations. These were of the view that, a national body for the Indians was not required to be established on the grounds that, existing associations were sufficient to protect the interests of the Indians. In addition, there were also those who felt worried because the idea of forming a national body was a ploy by certain groups to use the Indians for their political interests. (Jananayakam, 1 July 1946)

In order to get support from the Indian community towards the establishment of a national body, John Thivy visited the whole of Malaya and Singapore. During the visit, the Indian community was briefed about the political developments in Malaya and the need for them to think deeply about their future in this country as well as citizenship issues which had been proposed under the Malayan Union. (Jananayakam, 14 & 23 May 1946).

Besides, John Thivy also stated that, the suggestion to form a national body was not meant to compete with or undermine the associations or organizations that were readily available, but a person could become a member of the new national body and also a member of other associations at the same time. (Jananayakam, 19 June 1946). Jananayakam made extensive coverage of the visit by John Thivy, so that the Indians could get real

information about the idea to form MIC. In addition, Tamil Nesan had also supported the idea to form MIC. (Tamil Nesan , June 21 & July 26, 1946) Meanwhile, the Indian community in Singapore also supported the proposal by John Thivy and allowed him to hold meetings with the Indian leaders of Singapore on May 18, 1946 and manage to convince them of the need to set up a national body representing the Indian community. (Jananayakam, 22 May 1946). The support by the Indian community in Singapore could be seen when a committee was formed to organize a conference to discuss the formation of the national body. (Jananayakam , 22 May 1946)

A few weeks later, a conference was held and all the Indian Associations were invited and the conference agreed to form an interim committee under A.N.Mitra to manage the affairs of the formation of the national body. (Jananayakam, 14 June 1946). In a speech to the representatives of Indian Association in Singapore, A.N.Mitra spoke about the need for a national body in the context of developments that occurred with the changes in government and administration and that, Indian associations should be united and form a national body that can maintain political and economic interests of the Indians. (Tamil Nesan, 14 June 1946) Moreover, various parties criticized the idea of forming a national body for the Indians. However, this did not have much effect on John Thivy and he kept on trying to get support from the Indian community to this end. Although it was not an easy task, Thivy held a conference for three days from 3th of August, 1946 to discuss the establishment of the Malayan Indian National Agency. In this case, John Thivy had requested Indian associations and individuals who were interested, to attend the discussion. Jananayakam also urged the Indians to support John Thivy, so that efforts to set up a national body could become a reality.

A temporary office was set up in Maha Mariaman Temple in Kuala Lumpur to manage the organising of the conference. (Jananayakam , 4 July 1946). Most of the Indian Associations refused to attend the conference for the second time, on the

grounds that they were not officially invited to the first conference. (Jananayakam, 13 July 1946). One of the association was the Penang Indian Association, which criticized John Thivy for not sending an official invitation and its members were also not represented in the interim committee. (Jananayakam, 19 July 1946)

In order to set up a national body to represent the Indians in Malaya, it was important to take a step that could unite the Indian community under one effective organization .The national body was envisioned to be an organization that would have a constitution, a unitary structure with branches and have the same objective and one of the important departments that should be established is the Labour Department . (John Thivy Collected Papers). This is so because :

Labour problems are the most important for Indians in Malaya, because workers comprise the greater part of the Indian population. Workers must of necessity form themselves into Labour Unions. it is Unions through such that they will have to safeguard their rights and protect their welfare. It will not be enough for prominent Indians to take an interest, in their individual capacities. Instead of individuals taking the initiative to assist labor, a representative organization should take up the study of Labour problems for the whole of Malaya.
(John Thivy Collected Papers)

The proposal to establish the Labour Department in the national body elicited various reactions. Trade unions agreed with the idea of establishing a national body but they did not agree with the establishment of a branch for labour in the national body. They argued that, only they could represent the workers in Malaya and any other party that attempts to do so would be considered an invasion. (Jananayakam , 22 July 1946)

Consequently, Tamil Nesan reported that, “

All-Malayan States General Workers Union “ had welcomed the formation of MIC, but they were concerned that leaders who will be appointed as chairman later, will act on a whim and do things that are contrary to the issues or the interests of the workers . (Tamil Nesan, 26 July 1946). Tamil Nesan itself however, had a different view and supported the inclusion of the Labour Department into the MIC. This was because, the non-exclusion of the Labour Department would make the MIC seem as not representing the workers and therefore, the entire Indian community. Thus, Tamil Nesan called on the workers to join the MIC to ensure the leadership did not do anything contrary to the interests of the workers and also to make MIC a strong Indian organization. (Tamil Nesan , 26 July 1946)

In another development, the Labour Union of Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur and Perak Indian Labour Union, also issued a press statement criticizing the stand of “ All-Malayan States General Workers Union “ on the establishment of the Labour Department in the proposed establishment of MIC. The Labour Union of Sungai Besi in Kuala Lumpur conjectured that Indian labour in Malaya needed to remember that they are Indians and it is the duty of every Indian to cooperate with the proposed establishment of MIC to fight for the interests of the Indians. (Tamil Nesan , 30 July 1946)

In the meantime, the formation of the Labour Department in MIC was also opposed by the communists. Communist influence had begun to seep into the Trade Unions and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) which was established in 1930, relied heavily on the support of the workers and they are feared that, communist influence would be reduced if the workers were represented by the MIC. According to M.R.Stenson, the MCP was not opposed to the formation of separate communal organizations, although it preferred them to be under left-wing leadership or progressive, but it was completely opposed to any suggestion that might lead to effective competition for leadership of Indian labour. Thus, the prejudices of the radical Indian leaders regarding non-Tamil and elitist

leaderships were probably confirmed by instructions from the MCP to oppose the formation of the Labour Department, and if necessary, to boycott the new Indian Organization. (M.R.Stenson: 1980: 148-149)

Despite much opposition and reactions from various quarters, the effort to form a national body for the Indians continued unabated. In this case, the best way to be taken up was to hold a meeting to discuss the formation of the organization. As a first step, “All-Malayan Indian Organisation “ which was formed for that purpose, invited the Indian associations and the Indian leaders to attend a meeting to discuss the formation of a new national body for the Indians. In this regard, a meeting was held and attended by delegates from all over Malaya to draft a constitution for the national body that will be formed.

Meanwhile, the Tamil newspapers also announced the development of the meeting from time to time and on 2nd and 3rd August 1946, the objectives of the national body were published. (Jananayakam & Tamil Nesan, 2 & 3 August 1946). Consequently, an ‘ All-Malayan Indian Conference’ was held from 3rd to 5th August 1946. The result of this conference led to the formation of Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and John Thivy was elected as the first president of MIC. (MIC Annual Report 1946-1947)

In his inaugural address as president of MIC, John Thivy advised the Indians to strive for independence for Malaya and called upon Indians to work with other communities to achieve independence. He also assured that the party would seek to protect the rights and interests of Indians in Malaya. In this case, Jananayakam called the Indian community to respond to John Thivy and give support to MIC. (Jananayakam , 5 August 1946)

The formation of MIC also had the support of Tamil Murasu . In this case, Tamil Murasu expressed its view that the formation of MIC showed that the messages conveyed by Nehru has become a reality and the Indians in Malaya were indeed wise

to take steps to form the MIC. (Tamil Murasu , 5 August 1946). In addition, the Tamil Murasu also urged Indians to give their full support to MIC because in this way, the party will become stronger and will be able to protect the rights and welfare of Indians in Malaya. Tamil Murasu also stressed that the success and failure of this political party were in the hands of the Indians themselves. (Tamil Murasu , 5 August 1946)

It's true to say that, the formation of MIC was a turning point in the political history of Indians in Malaya. According to K.Anbalakan, MIC was established to centralize the power of Indians under a single political party in order to safeguard them effectively. (K.Anbalakan, 2008: 91). With the establishment of the MIC, the Indian leaders can fight for the political rights of Indians more systematically and can be fully involved in the local political arena and make MIC a platform representing the Indians in Malaya. According to S. Subramaniam, the most significant political development in the Indian Community in Malaya after the second world war was perhaps, the formation of the Malayan Indian Congress in August 1946. Since its inception, it has claimed to represent the political interests of all Indians in Malaya. The emergence of this political organization had its roots in Indian activities during the war years as well as developments in the local political scene after the war. (S. Subramaniam, 1973: 38)

Conclusion

Overall it can be said that, the Tamil newspapers, especially Tamil Nesan, Tamil Murasu and Jananayakam played an important role in the political development of Indians in Malaya. Various political issues of Indians were explored through the thoughts of Tamil newspapers and have opened the minds of the Indians giving them more room to engage in local politics, especially in raising political awareness and trigger political ideas among the Indians in Malaya. Thus, the Indians began to be actively involved in local politics and this has become more apparent after the World War II. The formation of MIC in 1946 is the best example

to prove the role of Tamil newspapers in raising the political awareness among Indians. The emergence of heightened political awareness among the Indian leaders in Malaya led to the formation of MIC by John Thivy with adequate assistance from the Tamil newspapers through their propaganda. Tamil newspapers played a crucial role in garnering confidence among the Indians to accept MIC as a national organization to fight for the interests of Indians in Malaya by providing detailed updates about every step in the formation of MIC till its culmination in August 1946.

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