

## THE FREEDOM FIGHTER - KR. KALYANARAMAN

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### Abstract

*The present-day Ranipet town was founded by Nawab Sadathullah Khan around 1771 in honour of the young queen of Desingu. The Nawab pressed Desingu to pay arrears of tribute but he refused to pay. Thus the stage was set for the confrontation which ended in the tragic death of the youthful Raja. The twenty two years old Raja Desingu fought with a rare gallantry that moved his friends and fees alike. Desingu's wife too gave up her life as a proud Rajput lady would do, to follow her fallen husband. These incidents so moved Sadathullah Khan that he named the present day Ranipet in honour of the queen of Desingu.*

*Keywords: civil, Congress, Committee, Presidency, Arcot, Cripps Mission*

Kalyanaraman was a defender of righteousness, a front rank fighter in the freedom struggle, a supporter of the downtrodden and a very bold champion of the neglected. He can be seen playing a very important role in the freedom struggle, and acting as a gallant volunteer in civil disobedience movement. One of the leading lights of patriotism, Kalyanaraman was born on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1907 in a village called Kuttiam, located 24 km from the town of Arcot, in Vellore district.

His father's name was Ramanatha Iyer and that of his mother Mangamma. Kalyanaraman had two brothers one elder to him and the other younger Ramanatha Iyer migrated to Ranipet with his family where he served as an advocate's clerk. Kalyanaraman had his primary education at Arni, Ranipet and Walajapet. Between 1917 and 1918 he studied in Tiruvannamalai. He had to discontinue studies as his father died suddenly. From 1918 to 1928 he studied in the Vedic Patshalas at Kancheepuram and Thirukazhukundram. He worked as a primary school teacher for eight months. He was transferred to four different places-Arcot, Kaniyanur, Pennagaram and Macheri-because he was a sympathizer of the Indian national Congress party. In 1929 he joined the teacher's training course at Ranipet and finished the course successfully in 1931. He was a born leader and wherever he went leaderships was thrust upon him by his colleagues.

Kalyanaraman began taking active part in political affairs. Meanwhile he got married and had three children.

Gandhiji was arrested on May 6, 1930. Then followed agitations and meetings in many places in the North Arcot district In spite of the imposition of ban order the political activities continued Arrack and toddy shop were picketed at many places like Gudiyattam, Vellore, Arni, Walajapet, Polur, Sholigur, by the torch bearers of freedom movement.

In all these Kalyanaraman stood at the forefront. In 1931 Gandhiji led Indians in an incessant struggle demanding full freedom. A dawn to dusk curfew was clamped down throughout the length and breadth of India. In spite of the upper handedness, of the police, Kalyanaraman who was then a student in the Teacher's Training school Ranipet (1929-31) hoisted the tricolour at Ranipet. He was immediately arrested on the spot by the police but let off with a warning as he was a student.

The congress working committee authorized Mahatma Gandhi to launch civil disobedience movement. Gandhiji in pursuance of this decision, set out from his Sabarmathi Asharam, with near about seventy volunteers, on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930 to offer civil disobedience. In those days, permission had to be obtained from the government for making salt. Gandhiji reached Dandi, a coastal village in Gujarat and made salt without obtaining permission from the government.

In Madras Presidency, the Congress Committee nominated Rajagopal Achari, who was then the president of the Provincial Congress Committee, and K Santhanam to lead the salt satyagraha. The executive committee of the provincial congress met at Vellore, the district headquarters of the North Arcot district, and resolved to start salt satyagraha at Vedaranian in Thanjavur district.

Meetings were held. Training camps for satyagraheer were conducted and processions were taken to mobilize public support. Training camp was held at Vellore, Arcot, Tanjore, Madras (Chennai) Chengelpet and Ranipet. It was under the leadership of Kalyanaraman that camps were started and held. There were forty satyagraheers. He was the guide for all satyagraheers in the North Arcot district. The British government was on the look out to thwart all plans of the freedom fighters. It started arresting all leaders and putting them behind bars. Rajaji along with other satyagraheers was arrested and given one year's imprisonment. The camp at Vedarnayans was forcibly disbanded by the police. Yet these drastic steps did not deter freedom fighters from carrying their fight. The movement was intensified. During 1932 civil disobedience movement was resumed and hundred were imprisoned. In spite of many repressive measures of the government the civil disobedience movement was carried out vehemently. Kalyanaraman was moved to the core. He decided to get totally involved. He resigned his job as a teacher and plunged deep into the freedom struggle.

Kalyanaraman went round addressing public meetings and making the people realize the importance of freedom. He was arrested and sent to jail for a year. He was lodged in Vellore Central jail. He hailed from a very orthodox Brahmin family. But after becoming a freedom fighter he began leading a life which was against all orthodoxy. He realized and began preaching equality among men. He became the deadliest enemy of untouchability.

The British government anticipated cooperation of the Indian National Congress in its war efforts. The congress demanded a commitment from the government as regards to freedom, which was not forthcoming. So the congress launched direct action as directed by Gandhiji. The provincial governments were dissolved and all joined in antiwar activities. Consequently the whole nation stood as one to support sathiyagraha. Gandhiji advised the volunteers to carry on the struggle without caring for hardships and difficulties. The Indians who had time and again exhibited their hatred to the activities of the British and had been fighting against its imperialism offered their unstinted support to the present move of Gandhiji. Thousand both from rural and urban areas, came forward. They were arrested and put in prisons. Many hundreds of volunteers' were left out as there were no jails to accommodate them. During this phase of agitation Kalyanaraman offered satyagraha at Ranipet for which he was arrested. He was sentenced to jail for nine months. In addition he was fined Rs 250/- He underwent this jail sentence at Tirupathur, Bellary and Alipore.

Cripps Mission failed. The Congress was thinking of starting a new struggle. Meanwhile to save the situation and find a solution Rajaji submitted a proposal before the Congress. He suggested that the congress could agree to Muslim league's demand of Pakistan. In return the league would extend cooperation in setting up of a national government. He also suggested that the popular government in Madras which had been dissolved might be made functional, in view of the growing threat of a Japanese invasion of the east coast of India. These proposals were accepted by Madras Provincial Congress Committee but out right rejected by the national Congress working committee. Rajaji resigned from all positions in Congress including his membership of the Madras legislative assembly, so as to free himself from all work for carrying his campaign. At this critical juncture it was Kalyanaraman who stood by Rajaji through thick and thin.

On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942 the Congress working committee passed the Quit India resolution. It was passed in Bombay and Gandhiji gave the slogan Do or Die, for this agitation. The government too was ready to meet any situation arising out of this satyagraha. On 9<sup>th</sup> August all leaders of the Congress party were arrested. The Congress was declared an illegal body. Unfortunately the Congress became leaderless for a few days with all leaders behind bars. Lack of leadership and non-systematic organization resulted in large scale anarchy in many parts of the country. Luckily in North Arcot district there was no outbreak of any kind.

Kamaraj who arrived at Arakkonam from Bombay dashed to the residence of Kalyanaraman to avoid being arrested by the police. Kalyanaraman took Kamaraj to a secure cottage of one of his

tanner friend. On the same day Kalyanaraman arranged for a taxi and reached Kaniyambadi. From there he and Kamaraj went to Thanjavur by train. Somehow Kamaraj escaped detection. Both of them reached Thanjavur and went to the house of the local leader TRV Narayainsami. After meeting all the local leader they left for Tiruchi and arrived there in the evening. They met the local leaders and went to Madurai. Kalyanaraman went up to Tuticorin and then returned to Ranipet. Police were waiting for his arrival. They immediately arrested him. He was kept in Walajapet sub jail and then moved to Vellore central jail from where he was taken to Thanjavur. Subsequently he was given a jail sentence for eighteen and a half months.

Right from the year 1930 Kalyanaraman participated in all freedom struggle movements and spent more than four years behind bars at Cannanore, Vellore, Alipore and Thanjavur. He was an emotional speaker, a true leader of the masses, a fighter of all good causes. He has served the nation in many ways. He strived all his life for the upliftment of the Harijans and fought against untouchability.

The inmates of the jail were served food separately keeping the caste system in view. In 1932, in the jail where Kalyanaraman was imprisoned higher caste inmates were served separately and the lower cast inmates had to dine separately. This enraged Kalyanaraman and his friend Gudiyattam Swaminathan alias Annal Thangal. Both of them resorted to fasting to put an end to this evil practice. They were able to bring in vogue common dining. From that time onwards he began working for the betterment of the down trodden.

The British came forward with communal award in 1932. Gandhiji undertook fast unto death from 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1932. To save Gandhiji's life the Congress leaders concluded the Poona Pact on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1932, and Gandhiji broke his fast. He continued to work for rooting out the scourge of untouchability. Consequently Harijan Sevak Saugh emerged throughout the country. After his release from Eraveda jail in 1933, Kalyanaraman engaged himself in the task of eliminating untouchability. Along with his fellow congressmen, Dr TSS Rajan, Kalyanaraman established a branch of Harijan Seva Sangh in the North Arcot district on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1932.

The sangh provided free education to harijan students and children in Harijan colonies. Kalyanaraman went from village to village preaching the message of patriotism and the need for uplifting the Harijans. His message was that until the down trodden did not rise there could not be real freedom even if it was got. He entertained Harijans in his house which became a heaven for needy Harijans.

Kalyanaraman served the interest of the scavenging community as an executive member, the secretary and then the president of the North Arcot district Harijan Seva Saugh. In recognition of his services to Harijans community, he was rewarded a on March 30, 1955 by Tiri Venkatesan, IAS the then collector of North Arcot district. Again in 1956 the state government awarded him a gold medal for the same service.

As a part of the civil Disobedience movement in 1930, Gandhiji started picketing toddy and liquor shops in his campaign against drinking. The welfare of the down trodden was close to Kalyanaraman's heart. He found many among them drinking liquor. He along with Rajaji toured more than 200 villages in the North Arcot district and addressed more than 500 meetings emphasizing the need for eschewing the habit of drinking. From his own resources he printed and distributed pamphlets pointing the evils of drinking. He published a book with the title "Madupanam Ozhiga" in 1946.

Bikshu Nirmalanda of Thiruvannamalai, a staunch Gandhian, founded Madras Mission Society in 1931. In 1952 its branch was opened at Ranipet. Apart from spreading the Gandhian ideals, this society rendered social service. In 1952 due to drought there was hunger and poverty everywhere in the district. During 1951-53 the North Arcot district, Chinglepet and Salem district were in the grip of a famine.

Kalyanaraman and a band of Congress social workers toured the Walajapet taluk to study the conditions of the people and do the needful. On 6<sup>th</sup> July 1952 a relief programme was started at Ranipet at Azad Illam. Free gruel and milk for 250 children below five years were provided. The camp served daily from 6<sup>th</sup> July to 2<sup>nd</sup> October due to the efforts of Kalyanaraman. Milk powder packets were given continuously. Vitamin tablets, coconut oil, sarkarai pongal and

thithipu payasam were served. Additionally many rich were persuaded to provide food packets to the needy.

Kalyanaraman was successful in securing the cooperation of youngsters belonging to different political parties. Under his leadership members of Gandhi Mission society visited villages in North Arcot district. Totally eighty thousand children were provided gruel and milk powder and more than three hundred were given clothes. Employment was provided to jobless farm hands who had no work due to famine. According to a plan drawn by the society workers were made to deepen tanks, farm wells, besides repair school buildings. The workers were provided implements to carry these jobs. Thus in Walaja taluk under the leadership of Kalyanaraman laudable work was done by a band of selfless volunteers to mitigate the sufferings of the people during those dark days of famine. Consequent on the onset of monsoon rains in 1952-53 the gruel centres in the district of North Arcot were closed. An announcement to this effect was made by the then district collector Sugavanam on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1953. Thus Gandhi Mission society under the guidance of Kalyanaraman rendered crucial services to the neglected poor. The year 1952 was a year of worst suffering for the people living in many states. Both the monsoons failed and there was famine in a many states including Madras. The land owner in the district of North Arcot (Madras state) depended on rain water. Each human settlement had tanks which stored water during rainy season. As there was no rain there was no water in tanks. All tanks had gone dry. Even farm wells had no water. The subsoil water level fell drastically. Animals died in large number. People ate whatever came handy oil cakes, leaves, grass roots, sweet potatoes and the like. There were many starvation deaths Kalyanaraman was very much upset due to the pathetic condition of the rural population. For days together people, old and young, went without a single meal. Kalyanaraman came forward to do something to mitigate the sufferings of the children, at least. He sought the help of some of the social workers like Akkur Ananthachariar, Kadaperi Jamadaugi and officials of EID Parry (Ranipet). He visited the surrounding villages of Ranipet and collected 24 most underprivileged children and started a school for them. The school was named as Gandhi Mission Balar Vidyalaya in memory of Sakuntala Nirmalanda wife Bikshu Nirmalanda, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1952 at Navalpore, a locality in Ranipet.

The school was given eight and a half acres of land free of cost at Walajapet. The managing committee gladly accepted the offer. The institution was moved to this site in Walajapet on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1953. The asharam was started with the active help of Govinda Rao Gurjale alias Bikshu Nirmalanda of Gandhi Mission society. Pittukkuli Murgadas was the chairman of the governing committee of the Asharam and Kalyanaraman was the general secretary.

When the institution was started it was housed in a dilapidated building. It was known as Gandabodi Chattram. What we see today is the fruit of the untiring efforts of Kalyanaraman and the philanthropy of Masilamani Mudaliar of Mayer and Company, Madras, and his friends. Inside the campus a library was built and another building by name "Kovai Illam" was added. At present there are more than three hundred students in the Asharam and fifteen teachers have been engaged. Orphans and destitute are provided food, clothing, accommodation and education up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. As far as possible gurukula system is followed in the Asharam. Those who complete eight standards are admitted in the local government higher secondary school. Owing to the ceaseless efforts of Kalyanaraman the Asharam receives grants from the central as well as state government.

After serving the Asharam for twenty years, Kalyanaraman handed over its management to A. Sampath Narasimhan, his trusted disciple. Kalyanaraman was inclined toward journalism. In the beginning he worked in 'Dinamani'. Later he himself started a Tamil weekly entitled "Jai Bharath". Its first issue hit stand on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1951. This weekly had news on current trends in the nation building activities, the appeals and messages of national leaders, the duties and obligations of the Indian citizens and much about Gandhiji's ideal and philosophy. Kalyanaraman utilized his weekly to highlight the condition of the common men during the famine of 1951-52. Kalyanaraman was a crusader to the core. He was among those leaders to whom the pathetic condition of the labourers was unbearable. In Tamil Nadu a trade union was founded by Thiruvika in 1918. Kalyanaraman was influenced by the activities of his friend Thiruvika. He established Parry's employees Union, Ranipet on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1946, with eighty members. This union was

registered on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1946 under the Indian Trade Union Act and was subsequently recognized by the management.

Kalyanaraman served as the honorary secretary of the Ranipet Labour Union during 1936-38, when he worked with V.V Giri the president of the union. He also served as the secretary of the Parry Company Employees Union Ranipet. He wrote a booklet on the labour situation. It was entitled as "Thozhilaler Vazhga". This book which was dedicated to Rajaji was released in 1950. Those who came in contact with Kalyanaraman were highly appreciative of his dedication to the causes that he cherished most. First and foremost he was a patriot ever ready to lay his life for his country.

Since 1930 Kalyanaraman participated in all movements connected with India's freedom. He spent nearly four years in several jails. Even outside the jail he led a life under the shadow of police surveillance. In recognition of his services during the struggle for country's freedom he was presented Tamra Patra, by the Indira Gandhi, the prime minister, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1972, when the silver jubilee of Indian independence was celebrated. He served as the secretary and then the president of Madras Harijan Sevak Singh, which was started in 1933. In recognition of his services he was awarded a silver plate on March 30, 1955. The government of Madras awarded him a gold medal, appreciating his efforts to banish the scourge of untouchability. In support of total prohibition he toured scores of villages in the North Arcot district along with Rajaji. In recognition of this he was felicitated and presented an award later by Prabhudas Patwari, the governor of Tamilnadu. He was very close to Kamaraj and many a time he saved. Kamaraj from being arrested. In acknowledgement of these, the committee for installing of Kamraj's statue honored Kalyanaraman by presenting him the Kamaraj Memorial Shield on October 3, 1976.

Kalyanaraman adored poet Bharathi. He named his daughter as Bharathi, after the poet. Wherever he went he talked about the ideals of the poet and his lofty message. Bharathi Society, Madras, in recognition of his services presented Bharathi Shield to him. During the famine in 1952, as secretary of the Gandhi Mission Society, Ranipet, he did all that could be done day in and day out to keep the masses feeding some way or other. He found the Deena Bandhu Ashram which was visited by several national leaders. Such a selfless hardworking social worker had two cherished dreams in his final days. One he wanted to meet 'Parmacharyal' and second he must die as a congressman. When the Pontiff visited Ranipet, he went to Kalyanaraman house as the later was bedridden. Thus his first wish was fulfilled. He died as a congressman as he ardently wished.

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