

WRITING POWER, WRITING NATION- NATIONALISTIC DISCOURSE IN THE SELECT HISTORICAL FICTION OF KALKI KRISHNAMURTHI

Dr.Mathangi.V,
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
PSGR Krishnammal College for Women,
Tamilnadu,
India.

ABSTRACT

Foucault's theory of power and resistance that became highly influential in the wake of post-structuralism is also severely disputed. According to Foucault, subversion is co-extensive with power, but he does not state on what ground resistance can be formed or exercised. His resistance lacks a subject or agent. But Edward Said, a post-colonial theorist believes in resistance and agency, particularly in the anti-colonial context. Kalki Krishnamurthi, a writer of Tamil origin, through his historical fiction, has not only presented a glorious past but provided the readers with an awareness of their own history, thus helping in decolonizing the native mind and also investing it with the power of the indigenous knowledge which in turn would make way for meaningful resistance on the part of the native who would become an effective intellectual agent. In order to attain this, Kalki has touched upon the most recurrent themes in the nation's writing like the environment and its abuse, economic exploitation, religion, education, art, architecture and literature. He has presented all these elements of anti-colonial relevance in his novels set in the Pallava and Chola period that is a thousand years old, and the pictures of direct contrast that he portrays purge the indigenous mind from the abuses heaped upon it by the colonizer and turn them into active agents, thus promoting resistance. It also aims to prove that historical fiction is not completely escapist in its tendencies, as is generally believed, but it has a concomitant agenda that reflects the preoccupations of the writer's own age.

Keywords: agency, resistance, anticolonial discourse

Kalki Krishnamurthy (1899-1954), a 20th century writer of Tamil origin was born in a small hamlet in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. He was an editor, a Tamil intellectual, a connoisseur of dance and music, a freedom fighter and activist in his own right. Kalki has become synonymous with the genre of historical romances in Tamil. He inaugurated his historical triad, all published initially in serial form, with *Parthiban Kanavu (The Dream of Parthiban)* in the year 1941. The second and his most popular novel *Sivagamiyin Sabatham (Sivakami's Vow)* was published in the year 1944. The last of the triptych *Ponniyin Selvan*, meaning the Son of River Ponni was published in 1950. All three novels put together run close to three thousand pages celebrate the glory of the Pallava and Chola dynasty. He has also written many social novels, essays, reviews and short stories. His novel *Alai Osai*(1948), meaning the Roar of Waves, won the prestigious *Sahitya Akademi* Award posthumously. The government of Tamil Nadu has nationalized the works of this stalwart taking into account the significance and impact of his works. His historical fiction has also been translated into English by standard publishers like Macmillan and Sahitya Akademi.

Kalki Krishnamurthi's historical novels, with an anti-colonial ideology that question colonial intervention raises significant questions about the conceptualization of Foucault's concept of power chiefly by highlighting the absence of the scope of resistance and agency that Foucault fails to explicate in his theory. Foucault's analysis is highly influential in fashioning the modern notion of power. In *History of Sexuality* Foucault contends that "Power

is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (93) as opposed to the general belief that power lies with a sovereign or a particular group of people. Foucault’s conception of power is also closely connected to the idea of resistance. According to him, resistance is a pre-condition for the operation of power - “where there is power, there is resistance” (95) he says, but this idea is highly contested because of his own stand on power. He says that resistance is co-extensive with power but does not state on what ground it can be employed or exercised. His resistance lacks a subject or agent, agency being the ability of an individual to execute a deed. Paul Kockelman in his “Agency The Relation between Meaning, Power and Knowledge” defines agency as “an inherent human capacity, sometimes phrased as an instinct for hope or rebellion and sometimes as a faculty such as free will or choice”(375). In post-colonial theory, agency is an important concept as it refers to “the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power” (Ashcroft 6).

Numerous theorists have borrowed from Foucault’s paradigms of power in spite of its shortcomings. Homi Bhabha’s and Edward Said’s formulation of colonial power is significant among them. Bhabha’s arguments on resistance in the context of colonial encounter are more in line with that of Foucault and hence have the same limitations. But Said offers a more liberal view. He negates the overarching concept of power and “retrieves a space for anti-colonial subjectivity and agency” (Práce 6). Though Said adhered to Foucault in his earlier writings, he later expressed in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, his wish of not descending into the “unique territory in which Foucault has imprisoned himself and others with him” (183). Said views Foucault’s opinion of power as a “curiously passive and sterile view . . . not so much of the uses of power, but of how and why power is gained, used and held onto”(221). Therefore the ‘totalizing’ feature of Foucault’s idea of power and his “lack of interest in the forces of effective resistance” (154) form the underpinning of Said’s dissent which he elaborates in “Foucault and the Imagination of Power”.

Said initially in his ground-breaking work *Orientalism* dealt with the Orient or the colonized, and discussed only the Western style of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). The question of the possibility of resistance on the part of the oppressed later induced him to take up a tangential view. “What I left out of *Orientalism* was the response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movements of decolonization all across the Third World” (xii) he asserts in *Culture and Imperialism*. His parting with Foucault also became complete because he felt Foucault does not “commit himself to descriptions of power and oppression with some intention of alleviating human suffering, pain or betrayed hope” (*World* 247). Said’s belief in anti-colonial agency is strengthened due to his conviction that it is a “move to reclaim human dignity and active historicity for the colonial and post-colonial subjects”, a move that is “at the heart of resistance movements” (86). Said is concerned in accentuating the agency of the resisting subjects in connection to their own histories and cultures.

Discussions about the presence of the native agency have been prevalent ever since the inception of imperialism. Some theoreticians consider agency as the monopoly of the West and it is claimed to be definitely superior because of its supposedly rational institutions. Some others debate that high to low levels of Eastern agency prevails, but mostly they were considered primitive or regressive. J.Hobson in his book *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory 1760-2010* opines that the Eurocentric imperialism is believed to be paternalizing in nature. As a result, he says, they are a “pioneering agency” (6) who are capable of auto-generating or auto-developing modernity. In contrast to this, the Eastern societies are entitled only for a “conditional agency” (6) because their institutions are reported to be irrational and hence incapable of self-development. So, any chance of modernity would become possible if only the Eastern people are hauled out of their stagnation by the West. The east can transform if, and only if the West begins its civilizing operation. Even Karl Marx had approved of this notion. He felt imperialism was the only way to “kick-start Eastern development” (4). Such views are understandable when seen from the perspective of the superior race which simply refuses to see the native subjects outside the strictures of colonial discourse. Said argues on the contrary and insists that natives are delineated in connection to their native knowledge and discourse which imply the functioning of colonial knowledge and power. He also insists that they have their own power and integrity: “It has been the substantial achievement of all of the intellectuals, and of course of the movements they worked with, by their historical, interpretive and analytic efforts to have identified the culture of resistance as a cultural enterprise possessing a long tradition of integrity and power in its own right, one not simply grasped as a belated, reactive response to Western imperialism” (*Culture* 250). Said firmly believes that the Other exists within its own history and culture. To refute this detail would mean that “the native subject is a colonial discursive product, one that came into being only upon its entry into the history and discourse of the West” (Práce 30).

The question of agency is highly significant in India taking into account that it is one of the first countries to get independence from Britain. Anti-colonial discourse was promoted in a full swing in the third and final phase of the Indian freedom struggle. Anti-colonialism that had its roots in the freedom struggle movements of the colonized nations fought to free itself from the clutches of the colonizers and they were against any form of

exhortation and subjugation. Many nationalists and reformists from the colonized countries contributed to this concept. Frantz Fanon of France and Aime Cesaire of Africa were prominent among them. George J. Sefa Dei in his introduction to *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance* says: “The anti-colonial challenges any form of economic, cultural, political and spiritual dominance. It is about identifying and countering all forms of colonial domination as manifested in everyday practice, including individual and collective social practices, as well as global interactions” (5). This credo formerly nescient in the Indian soil was spread by the efforts of the Indian National Congress when it came under the headship of Gandhi, one of the major proponents of anti-colonialism in India. Gandhi’s principles were tested and contested throughout the country. Nevertheless he succeeded in mobilizing the Indians with one consummate motive – the end of colonial occupation in India.

. The epic-scale historical novels of Kalki touch upon the elements that instigate anti-colonial thought. Anti-colonial thinking is about the naming of “domination and imposition of colonial relations” (Dei 11). The ability to identify this repression, coupled with the awareness of one’s own history, would help in decolonizing the native mind and invest it with the power of the indigenous knowledge, which in turn would make way for meaningful resistance on the part of the native who would become an effective intellectual agent. “Agency emerges from the power of knowing and knowledge, and it is this that gives meaning to social and political action” (15) says Dei, and Kalki’s historical novels presented the reader with the knowledge of their glorious history, thereby vesting them with the power to combat the material and non-material encroachments of the British.

Many anti-colonial theoreticians believe in exposing the ubiquitous colonial practices frequent in the everyday life of the local subjects. They believed that real time knowledge would help them to effectively resist the political maneuverings of the colonizer. Kalki’s attempt at writing historical novels set a thousand years before dismisses such possibilities. Yet he makes the novels the vehicles of the concomitant agenda. Haunani-Kay Trask notes: “we do not need, nor do we want [to be] liberated from our past because it is source of our understanding . . . [We] . . . stand firmly in the present, with [our] back to the future, and [our] eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas”(164). Kalki’s efficient use of the historical novel as a tool to spread the anti-colonial ideology proves his knowledge about the role and function of history and fiction in the anti-colonial sphere.

The colonizer is always keen on countering all measures of subversion by perpetuating falsity and oppression. They firmly believed that the East is incompetent in delineating itself. Lord Ellenborough, the former Governor-General of India, remarked that their hold on India rested upon the superior nature and potential of the Europeans. But the British themselves were not indefectible. Their prestige was based on the image of moral and racial superiority which they tried to maintain fearing dissent from the colonized. In order to avert any kind of resistance, the English were bent on debasing everything Indian. “Colonized peoples require an anti-colonial prism that is useful in helping to disabuse our minds of the lies and falsehoods told about our peoples, our pasts and our histories” (4) contends Sefa Dei. Kalki’s historical novels provide such a prism to the Tamil reading audience that helped in the propagation of the anti-colonial credo.

Kalki, like many other regional writers of his period, glorified the pre-colonial art, culture, tradition and literature. He wanted to revivify a past untainted by the English and the historical novel became a felicitous instrument in his hands. His motive was to instill the spirit of nationality in the hearts of all Tamils so that they may effectively resist domination. But his most eventful move was to identify and represent the economic, political, cultural and spiritual hegemony of the colonizer. By contrasting these repressions to the once sublime status of the nation, he impelled the people to break themselves from all forms of oppression.

Kalki, in his efforts to uncover the overbearing practices of the colonizer, deals with one of the most recurrent themes in the nation’s writing – the environment and its exploitation. The issue of environment is highly significant in anti-colonial and post-colonial studies because of the abuse of the colonialist of the indigenous environment and landscape. The native space is dominated by greed and plunder and this became a pressing issue. Kalki’s environmental agenda finds expression by the portrayal of the Tamil landscape as a terrain of bounty. “Representations of the landscape have always encoded political interests and power relations” (1) says Pramod K.Nayar. These depictions effectively oppose the popular beliefs promoted by the colonizer to maintain their control over the land of the colonized. Rajat Kant Ray notes how the British depleted the food and other resources, thereby being directly responsible for the Bengal Famine of 1770 that claimed many lives. But the British circulated the idea that the encompassing poverty was natural and inescapable, a calamity caused by God and nature. Historical evidences favour the contrary and espouse the portrayal of prosperity. Sailendranath Sen in *Ancient Indian History*

and Civilization talks of 'nature's bounty' in India detailing the rivers, valleys and the forest resources of the country.

Much evidence for the plentitude can be gathered from the folk songs of South India. The Sangam texts like *Malaipadukada* and also the temple inscriptions talk of the overabundance. The inscriptions particularly refer to the perennial rivers in the state that are responsible for the surplus yield from the fields. *An Atlas and Survey of South Asian History* mentions the abundance of natural resources in Southern India during the Chola time and how the rulers expanded the state in order to optimize these resources. Kalki, true to such historical information, has portrayed the landscape brimming with abundance. The river Cauvery finds a special mention in most of the writings. The river flowing through the state has turned the entire basin into the most fertile lands of the region, and Sen remarks: "The Cauvery delta has formed the core of Tamil culture, and the river is as famous in Tamil literature as the Ganges is in Sanskrit" (4). Kalki, in delineating the greatness of the Tamil culture, has aptly presented river Cauvery/Ponni as a character.

The three novels of Kalki begin with the description of nature, especially the water resources. *The Dream of Parthiban* presents a glorious dawn on the banks of river Ponni. *Sivagami's Vow* portrays two travelers walking on the highway adjoining Mahendra Thadakam. *Ponniyin Selvan* begins with the journey of Vandiyathevan along the banks of the Veeranam Lake, an extension of river Kaveri. The agricultural underpinning of the country is aptly glorified by Kalki who begins this novel on the eighteenth day in the month of Adi or Adi Perukku as it is called, the first among the series of festivals that pays tribute to the various elements required for farming and irrigation.

Description of nature's beauty and plentitude form a major part of the novels. *Sivagami's Vow* describes the agricultural bounty found on both sides of the highway leading to Kanchi: ". . . fields of red paddy ripe for harvest stretched far and wide. The weight of the mature grains had caused the crops to bend over and kiss the ground. Here and there, in some of the fields, the farmers were bundling up the winnowed straw. The wholesome smell of fresh-cut paddy and straw was gently wafted on the breeze" (19).

The commercialization of agriculture during the British occupation with all its accompanying evil is the epicenter of Kalki's contrasting portrayal. The commercialization that should have escalated the agricultural productivity had generated adverse effects, because the British wanted India only to be a supplier of food grains and raw materials to the British. Increasing the agricultural yield of India was not found in the colonial agenda of the British. Kalki reiteratively foregrounded the country's natural wealth in order to contrast it with the colonial notion of plunder and its devastating effects. Also, the concept of the terrain reflecting the mind of the people is very common, for men's life in the Tamil realm has been based on its endless connection with the land, and Kalki's portrayal is definitely a call for rejuvenating the mind of the natives.

The theme of environmental bounty is directly connected to the economic exploitation of the West. "The empire was nothing if not an engine of economic gain" observes Chandrika Kaul, a lecturer in Modern History. Initially the Indians expected a positive outcome from colonization. They hoped that the modern technological innovations of the British would promote the productivity of India. But the real picture was perceived only in the 1860s. The trade policies framed by the British had colonial patterns of trade in which India became the exporter of primary raw materials and importer of manufactured goods. Cunning exploitation of the import and export duties levied by the British shattered the distinction of Indian goods, especially silk and cotton. There was a virtual collapse of handloom industry, metal work, paper and glass industries. India was forced to bear the cost of British administration and also to fund their wars and expeditions.

Three significant men through their economic analysis uncovered the real face of the colonizer who used trade and investment as a tool of plunder. Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade made an analysis of the modern industrial development. Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India studied the "continuous impoverishment and exhaustion of the country" and "the wretched heart-rending, blood-boiling condition of India" where the Indian is "starving, he is dying off at the slightest touch, living on insufficient food" (93). Romesh Chandra Dutt published *Economic History of India* in which he traced the Indian economy from 1757. The dissident voices of these men proclaimed the 'Drain of Wealth' theory which detailed the process that the British used to drain the Indian economy.

The economic critique paved the way for the birth and development of the Indian National Movement which propelled the nation towards economic swadeshi. An agitation against India's economic subservience to the British gained momentum, and Kalki's portrayal is highly consequential, because, he not only highlights the economic prosperity of the nation but also insists on its cultural uniqueness. This was a noteworthy trait because the mores of the nation was constantly contrasted to the materialism of the West in the discourse of the freedom

struggle. For instance, the towns portrayed by Kalki bear the mark of prosperity. The city of Kanchi that Kalki featured in *Sivakami's Vow*

. . . was the most famous one in the South. Every one of the city streets was wide enough to allow the huge temple carts or *thers* to roll through them freely. The houses adjoining streets were all mansion . . . The streets housing various shops were an incomparable spectacle. All the umpteen number of goods produced from Kasi to Kanyakumari in the sub-continent of Bharath were readily available for sale in those streets... (26)

Such descriptions are coupled with the well-delineated protagonists of Kalki – Kings, princes, men of royal families and even commoners, who value integrity and good sense above anything else. Their sense of morality makes them seek a higher purpose in life. His Ponniiyin Selvan willingly gave up his kingship to his kin whom he felt was more entitled to it. Instead, he wanted to build a lasting monument, a temple that would stand tall for thousands of years speaking the greatness of the Chola art and architecture. Narasimha Pallavan of *Sivagami's Vow* fell in love with a common dancer woman. Vikraman of *Parthiban's Dream* is banished from his native country. He is ordained with a death sentence if spotted again in the kingdom. At the same time he is also made the King of a small Tamil-speaking island, Senbagath Theevu in a far off country. But Parthiban risks his life and returns back for the love of his native land, his mother and the woman who has stolen his heart. Vandhiyath Thevan in *Ponniyin Selvan* is once lost in the vault of a dark mansion. He later finds the vault filled with riches unimaginable. But his excitement is controlled by his good sense:

The sages compared a spider's web to man's lust for land, gold and women . . . A man who takes the wrong path becomes ensnared in the web of desire. He can never free himself . . . Why should he allow himself to be trapped? Why did he want a kingdom? Or wealth? Or even the company of women? The wide earth with the sky as its roof was his palace. Have not old Tamil savants sung, "O listen well, the whole world is yours!" Every town was his. All people his kin. To go wherever he wanted, enjoy the sight of first flood rising in the river . . . (217)

Vandhiyath Thevan's musings highlight yet another dominant sensibility inherent in the Indian land – the essence of spirituality. "Spirituality has been used as a form of resistance, connection and identity. Over the years, it has also been used as a tool to combat, analyze, make sense of and develop ways and means of finding solutions to problems in society" (30) says Njoki Wane. Anti-colonial theories too assert that effective resistance becomes a possibility when spiritual percipience is attained:

By placing spiritual knowings in an anti- colonial discourse and practice, we affirm the symbolic, conscious and unconscious processes that inform our political work, to address domination and social oppression as they initially flow from the inner self/environment. In other words the spiritual grounds the political . . . everyday politics is thus determined by our spiritual worldviews and cosmovision. (Dei 6)

Dei defines spirituality as an "understanding of the person-hood, a synergy of the body, mind and soul and an accompanying awareness and respect for the wholeness of being, the interconnectedness of all things and a belief in a Greater Power that is beyond the capacities of the human senses to comprehend"(6). Upholding one's integrity, reinventing oneself and unrelenting perseverance becomes a possibility when one has knowledge of one's spirit. Partha Chatterjee in *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* insists on the significance of the spiritual cognizance for the anti-colonial subjects:

. . . anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before its battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains - the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside' of the economy . . . of science and technology . . . where the West has proved its superiority. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater the need to preserve the distinctiveness of one's spiritual culture. (6)

The spiritual-material antimony came into existence in India during the nineteenth century. "If 'progress' was to be seen inevitably in terms of the West's industrial advancement, then the spiritual-material dichotomy served to save India's progress from being a copy of the West. It invested the problem of India's industrial

advancement with a cultural dimension” (168) says Krishna Kumar. Chatterjee’s insistence is highly crucial because the British simply ignored the fact that India’s cultural exclusivity lies in its spirituality. They felt that the colonized need assistance even in finding salvation and hence persisted with their civilizing mission. When spiritual leaders like Sri Aurobindo insisted on redesigning spiritual ideals that would allow India to tackle tribulations, the West was keen on promoting the spirit of dissociation, out of fear, because they knew it was impossible to fight a united India.

India is a land of rich religious heterogeneity. The multiplicity created discord even during the pre-colonial era, especially between the Hindus and Muslims, but the British exploited such dissonances to maintain hegemony. Cross, the Secretary of State, wrote to the Viceroy in 1887 that the division of religious feeling is greatly to their advantage. Such discourses stand testimony to the divide and rule policy followed by Britain in India. The birth of the Indian National Congress only furthered the Hindu-Muslim feud as to who would have political dominance over the country. The formation of the Muslim League Party with Jinnah’s headship insisting on a separate nation for the Muslims and Gandhi’s contention on Hindu-Muslim unity formed a volley of religious wrangles.

Kalki’s philosophical and religious mind comprehended fully well that true religious experience would lead to spiritual awareness. He has delineated a past time rife with serious religious disputes and has highlighted how, earnest spiritual experience can help solve the dissension. The dissent between the Hindus and Muslims are presented through the discord between Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. Hinduism, a religion that is believed to be in existence in India even before the Indus Valley Civilization, was overshadowed by the spread of new religions like Buddhism and Jainism. But the seventh century saw the revival of Hinduism in South India by the efforts of Adi Shankara. Richard H. Davis in, “The Story of the Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Shaiva-Jain Encounter in Medieval South India” refers to the *Mattavilasaiprahāṣaṇa* and *Periyapuranam* as texts of this period that ridicule the Buddhists and Jainas. The Bhakti Movement with its Shaiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Alvars also played an important role. King Mahendravarman of the Pallava empire who was ruling over a major portion of Tamil Nadu converted from Jainism to Saivite faith under the influence of Appar, the Saiva saint. This part of history features in *Sivagami’s Vow*.

The very first chapter “Travellers” of Part One of *Sivagami’s Vow* captures the conflict elaborately. Paramjothi asks his fellow traveler, a Buddhist monk, if Buddha would bestow his blessings upon him, a Saivite. No sooner they meet up with a Jain monk who is leaving the Pallava kingdom, obviously incensed by the fact that the king has turned into a Saivite:

“ ‘Ah-ha!’ exclaimed the Jain monk in a bitter tone. ‘Why should I linger on in this land of Siva? Has not this kingdom of the Pallavas been transformed into a cremation ground for Siva . . . I am going over to the Pandya kingdom.’[. . .]

‘Now, the Saivites and the Vaishnavites, the followers of Siva and Vishnu, are reigning supreme in this Pallava kingdom.’ ” (21)

Disputes of such nature are also found in *Ponniyin Selvan*. The novel mostly records the dissensions between the Saivites and the Vaishnavites. The bickering, though portrayed in a humorous and amusing vein, echoes the fervid religious convictions of the people. Krishna Mohan Shrimali in his address on “The Formation of Religious Identities in India” states that these conflicts gained such massive proportions that the city of Kanchi itself was divided into two separate quarters, Shiva Kanchi and Vishnu Kanchi. Chapter Two of “The First Floods”, Part One of *Ponniyin Selvan* titled “Azhwarkadiyan Nambi” pictures one of many such religious banterings:

Tha Saivite said, “Oh Azhwarkadiyan Nambi! Please answer this. Don’t you know that Brahma tried to find Siva’s head and Vishnu His feet? Since neither of them succeeded . . . How then can your Vishnu be a greater God than Siva?”

“So what! . . . Your Siva granted many boons to the ten-headed Ravana of Lanka. But all these boons were reduced to nothing before the Kodhanda bow wielded by Sri Rama, our Vishnu’s incarnation. . . Then how can your Siva be greater than our Vishnu, our Thirumal?”(8)

These exchanges cannot but remind the contemporaries of Kalki about the Hindu-Muslim dispute. Also, the Jain monk leaving the Pallava land was typical of the Muslims insisting on a separate nation for themselves, a two-nation theory which was vehemently opposed by Gandhi.

The novels abound with religious characters of legendary fame from the past time. Saint Tirunavukkarasar, Sundaramurti Nayar, Siruthondar, Nyanasambandar, Nadhamunigal, Nambiandar Nambi, Sembian Madevi Pirati and Mangayarkarasi are a few among them. Their religious *tours de force* are narrated profusely throughout the novels. They are also complemented by numerous fictional characters like Azhwarkadiyan Nambi, Senthana Amuthan and Sivanadiyar, all aggrandizing the discourse of religion. Despite the overwhelming differences that exist in their belief system, all these characters exude the essence of spirituality. The anecdotes from the life of real characters insist on the oneness of all creations and the greatness of the Creator. The imaginary characters are the mouth-piece of Kalki's own period. From doubts to discord, from tolerance to integrity, these characters present myriad qualities representing the nation as it was and as it should be.

Kalki's royal protagonists - Mahendravarman, Narasimhavarman and Raja Rajan – are depicted to be highly tolerant of other religions. History presents evidence to this attitude of the great king Raja Rajan. Sanu Kainiraka in *From Indus to Independence - A Trek Through Indian History: Vol III The Disintegration of Empires* states that though Raja Rajan was a confirmed Shiva worshipper, he was enlightened and broad-minded and exercised religious tolerance. The Pallavas are also reported to have been tolerant to a certain extent. Mahendra Varma Pallava's conversion and the ensuing events reported in history are found to be contradictory. But Kalki's portrayal presents the King in an immaculate light. "However, he (Mahendra Varman) had not discriminated against any religious faith. Instead, he had equal regard for the Saivites, the Vaishnavites, the Saktas, the Buddhists and the Jains in his kingdom and had treated them all alike. Hence, he had earned the special name of *Guna Parar* . . ." (88).

The culmination of this depiction is found in the Chapter entitled "Rock Temples" of Part One of *Sivagami's Vow*. Emperor Mahendran discloses his plans for the rock-cut temples of Mamallapuram to his son Narasimhan. The first two temples in Mamallapuram will hold the deities of Siva and Devi, Vishnu and Lakshmi. The third temple is to be adorned by a giant statue of Lord Buddha and the fourth with the image of the founder of the Jain faith, Vardha Mana Maha Veera. When Narasimhan wonders at his father's sense of tolerance, the Emperor replies, "The real reason I left the Jain faith and embraced Saivism is to establish this kind of religious equality in our land. The Saivite faith allows one to treat the other faiths with the same reverence and to glorify them all equally. The other faiths do not permit this universal acceptance . . ." (123). When questioned about the fifth temple, the Emperor replies, "In countries that lie far away to the West, a new religion has apparently become established for some time. Its great founder – an Incarnation of God, is said to be a man called Jesus Christ. . . I had thought of installing whoever the deity was of this new religion in the fifth temple. . ." (124).

Kalki's Mahendra Varman establishes himself as an emperor par excellence through his ennobled religious notions. Though historical records present evidence to the arrival of the Christian Apostle St. Thomas to South India as early as 57 AD, there is no proof to substantiate that the Pallavas even knew about those missionaries. But Kalki's ingenious mind, through Mahendra Pallava, has voiced the sublime nature of the nation's spirituality that has the ability to rise past all paltry differences and embrace greater power and greater goodness, thereby canonizing the quality of love, tolerance and non-violence, which was insisted by Gandhi, time and again, as the essence of the nation in his endeavour to secure the Hindu-Muslim unity.

Kalki's circumspection has restrained him from exploring the arcane aspect of spirituality. However, that has not hindered him from making a passing reference to the higher concepts. Part III- "The Killer Sword" of *Ponniyin Selvan* contains a chapter featuring Vandhiyathevan escaping from the clutches of the evil-minded Pinakapani who is trying to frame him on the grounds of false accusations. But Vandiyatheven tries to outsmart him by faking ignorance. Pinakapani questions the hero to reveal his real identity and Vandhiyathevan replies:

"You are asking me who I am. Which I do you mean? Do you mean this body which is made of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether? Do you mean the life hidden within this body or do you mean the atman which is the mainstay of life? Or the Paramatman which is the life-force of the atman? Appane! What a question! Neither you nor I exist. Everything is God. The world is maya, an illusion. Learn from great men like Thirunaraiyur Nambi, the truth about the wealth (pasu), the husband (pathi) and attachment (pasam)." (136)

The questions put forward by Vandhiyatheven have been the ruminations of countless saints of the holy nation of India. These cogitations led to their enlightenment and Kalki has edified the reader with their findings in the above lines. The passage may sound like yet another cheerful badinage of Vandhiyathevan, but the perceptive reader will assimilate the strong spiritual implication. The knowledge of the existence of such stupendous notions of spirituality will endow the reader with a strong sense of self and will to resist materialism with all its accompanying evils.

Many nationalists and reformers believed that several aspects of culture, including spirituality, can be spread through education. Knowledge, dubbed as a pre-requisite for agency, is directly associated with learning and education. “Colonialism does not engender creativity; it stifles it, suppresses it under the cloak of assistance when in fact it is creating conditions that make it impossible for humans to effectively resist”(Dei ix). Education is one such cloak of assistance utilized by the colonizer. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s notorious 1835 *Minutes on Indian Education* is an evident expression of the unfair policy that Britain undertook to follow to achieve their ends which was to create “. . . a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”(6). Colonial reign did not permit the insertion of indigenous knowledge and culture in the curricula of normal schools. ‘Indigenous’ was equated to ‘deficient’. The curriculum was framed to represent the colonial values. The implementation of English language education resulted in landing a death blow to all the classical and regional languages of India. The educational praxis of the country underwent a total change.

Aime Cesaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* equated colonization to “thingification”(9). The colonizer objectifies or inferiorizes the natives on grounds of being inept, unintelligent and incapable of taking care of oneself. English education is one of the tools of the colonizer’s civilizing mission. And they obviously took pride in undertaking this dehumanizing operation. T.B.Macaulay in 1833 stated: “. . . by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government, that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions . . . Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history” (154-155). Initially, Hunter’s Commission intended to set up colleges and Universities that would spread English education in India. Later it influenced the schools and the main motive of the British was to produce clerks with English knowledge who would support the successful governance of Britain in India.

The educated Indians sought to counter this by the implementation of nationalist education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy through his Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and many others came up with their own notion of education. They also tested their doctrines in regions under their influence. The commonality lay in their insistence on the study of Sanskrit and other regional languages and Indian scriptures. They promoted “education which is indigenous in essence; which advocates the growth of mind, body and soul; which fetches livelihood to the individual.” (Shruti Bidwaikar 37)

Kalki has immortalized the greatness of education in Chapter Five of Part I of *Sivagami’s Vow*. Paramjothi, a village lad wanted to educate himself so that he may marry his heart’s favourite, Umaiyal. His uncle believed that a broad knowledge of Tamil, along with an acquisition of a fine art would help him thrive. Paramjothi hence expresses his desire to go to Kanchi and the narrator highlights the greatness of the city:

In those days, the metropolis of Kanchi was home to Sarasvathi, The Goddess of all Knowledge and the Fine Arts herself. Kanchi was filled with Vedic Katis providing instruction in Sanskrit, Thiru Matams teaching Tamil, Viharas purveying Buddhist philosophy and religion and Pallis spreading the Jain creed. Besides, there were excellent institutes for learning the fine arts of painting, sculpture and music. (39)

In the above lines, Kalki records real historical facts about the greatness of the educational system in Kanchi. It stands evidence to the ideal education system followed a thousand years ago with insistence on learning of classical and regional languages and fine arts. The key point is the depiction of religious teachings that also promoted a spiritual way of life. Though the references provided by Kalki regarding education are scant, they trenchantly indicate the import of educational liberation in colonial India.

Kalki, in a similar vein, profusely glorifies native literature in the novels. The reason is to purge the indigenous mind from the abuses and falsities heaped upon it. Macaulay in his Minute mentions: “. . .I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works... a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (230). In a speech given by him in Edinburgh Philosophical Society, he boasts of the literature of Britain, mightier than their arms and commerce, which has influenced the Indian mind to a great extent that it has eradicated the malicious superstitions. Kalki challenged such ideas by copiously quoting from his native literature in *Ponniyin Selvan*. The poems and songs not only supplement the narrative flow, but also prove the qualitative literary bounty of the Tamil language. *Thirukkural*, a classic of the Tamil Sangam literature is referred to in all his novels, and in *The Dream of Parthiban*, the titular king Parthiban of Chola dynasty passes over the legendary sword of his ancestors along with the manuscript of *Thirukkural* to his son Vikraman, professing the greatness of the text and the wisdom it would impart to a ruler thus helping him achieve monumental glory.

Indian art and architecture was also equally derided by the British. James Fergusson in his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* states that Indian architecture is “a mistake which nothing can redeem” (368). The majestic temples of South India were unworthy because they were found wanting in “those lofty aims and noble results which constitute the merit and greatness of true architectural art” (342). A writer and art critic of Victorian period, John Ruskin stated that Indian art forms are monstrous. George Birdwood, an Anglo-Indian writer and naturalist commented that fine arts like painting and sculpture did not exist in India.

Kalki challenges such depictions in his *Sivagami's Vow* where he venerates sculpting, painting and Bharatanatyam, the major genre of Indian classical dance. Ayanar and the titular Sivagami, the two fictional characters have become archetypes in Tamil literature representing their skill and mastery in sculpting and dancing respectively. The construction of Mamallapuram in *Sivagami's Vow* and Brihadeeshwarar Temple in *Ponniyin Selvan* form an important part of the novel's discourse. King Parthiban of *Dream of Parthibhan* is portrayed as a painter par excellence. There are continuous references to the art forms and construction of temples in all the three novels.

Kalki has made his historical novels a canvas where he has exemplified the existing and evolving ideals of the then Tamil Nadu. The issues presented in the novels may seem generic in nature, but the regionalist may decipher that Kalki has pictured the events that set into motion the formation of a distinct Tamil identity. His great granddaughter Akhila Ramnarayan in *Dwelling in Futures Past: Place, Region and Tamil Nation in R. Krsnamurti's Civakamiyin Capatam* states:

. . . Using the historical romance as a lens with which to examine erstwhile formulations of Tamil identity (Indian nationalist and colonial rhetoric; Dravidian political separatism and anti-Brahmanism; the tanitamil (separate Tamil) language purity and *suya mariyatei* (self-respect) movements; the resurgence of Saiva Siddhanta religious tenets; the advent of theosophy in Tamilnadu; and Tamil *marumalarcci* or cultural renaissance), I argue that Krsnamurti's novelistic writing sketched a cultural and political canvas against which competing and complementary ideals of a new regionalist consciousness could emerge, signalling a new kind of interventionist literature in the Tamil instance . . .

Kalki's novels thus form a significant part of the freedom struggle. At the same time these novels also contribute to the formation of a unique Tamil identity. Kalki's resourcefulness is evident as he has presented all these issues in his historical novels without making any direct references to them. It is a known fact that the British banned many of the Tamil weeklies during the early 20th century including Subramanya Bharathi's Tamil weekly *India* and Tamil daily *Vijaya* for its revolutionary content. Bharathi had to flee to the French-controlled Pondicherry to escape imprisonment. Though Kalki's times were far better, he is to be credited for representing the regional consciousness in varying colours and degrees.

Kalki wrote during the third and final phase of the Indian freedom struggle. India by then had evolved into a nation with a strong anti-colonial ideology. In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Said says that novels in the West played an immense role in framing the imperial attitudes of the people. On similar grounds, novels can also be considered a powerful means to align the minds of the colonized against the colonizer. Kalki through his novels plainly endeavored to do so, and his efforts to strengthen the anti-colonial ideology of the nation invoke the concept of power struggle and resistance, for colonial occupation sustains on the sheer exercise of power. Foucault's theory of power is applied to Kalki's novels on this ground and the lack of theoretical substantiation for the concept of resistance in his theory, in colonial context and otherwise, is foregrounded. But Said's formulations in favor of native agency and the indigenous' capacity to resist accentuate the importance of anti-colonial enterprise and facilitate the analysis of the novels in the light of the same.

Kalki can be considered a pioneer in the Tamil arena to use the historical novel to combat the material and non-material encroachments of the British. In an era when even information was being colonized, Kalki sought to counter it by steering the individual to prioritize himself over the false ideologies that were promoted by the British to maintain their domination. He did this by identifying the various forms of oppression and presenting it to the readers, not directly, but by invoking the past in its full glory and contrasting it to the scenes of the present. He tried to reclaim the voices suppressed by the British occupation by insightfully vesting his characters with a vigour and vitality previously unknown in the prose tradition of Tamil. His motive was to instill the spirit of nationality in the hearts of all Tamils so that they may effectively resist domination. He instigated the Tamils to wage a cultural, intellectual and psychological war against the British. His writings stand proof for the fact that the West cannot

ignore the indigenous, and that their culture and history are not mere archives but bedrocks that can bolster the nation.

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