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TRENDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Historically speaking, some evidence shows that two distinct races arose in India, namely the Aryan and the Dravidian. In the beginning, the Aryans lived in North India, while the Dravidians lived in the southern part of the Vindhya Mountains, which was called 'Dravida Nadu'. The people of the region spoke four major languages, namely, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. It is true that in the historical past these Dravidians had their own culture distinct from that of the Aryans living in North India. But over the years, and especially after the arrival of the British, the distinct cultural activities of these two racial groups had to largely disappear, as a result of continuous and constant acculturation that trapped them. On the other hand, only in the Twentieth Century, the South Indian Dravidian movement had emerged as organized. It was more a manifestation of the socio-political consciousness of Tamil Nadu's backward classes than the assertion of one cultural group against other dominant cultural groups. The British rule and the expansion of Western education and Christianity and the rise and growth of nationalist and liberation tendencies contributed a lot to the rise and growth of the Dravidian Movement in South India especially in Tamil Nadu. Historically, the formation of the Dravidian Association in 1912 is the starting point of the Dravidian Movement and during the days of E.V.Ramasami, C.N. Annadurai and M.Karunanidhi this Movement was in its key days. After the demise of M.Karunanidhi, the this Movement gets impetus under the M.K. Stalin, the son and successor of M.Karunanidhi, the D.M.K. patriarch



KEYWORDS: D.M.K., D.K., A.I.A.D.M.K., E.V.Ramasami, C.N. Annadurai, M.Karunanidhi, Dravidian Movement, Self-Respect Movement.

INTRODUCTION

For the first time all of India was united under the British system of government. Although it was a kind of political unification achieved by the British, cultural unification between the south and the north was not their goal of unity. This division was later used by supporters of the Dravidian movement.

It was the British who, with the introduction of print media, first racially colored the culturally inactive groups among the Tamils. Subsequently, it became a source for the Dravidian campaign against Aryan rule in Tamil Nadu. Western education brought with it Western liberal ideas, democratic

leanings, artistic excellence, and literary greatness. Although Brahmins monopolized English education in the early years, it was later extended to people of other communities as well. In particular, the dawn of the Twentieth Century heralded a new socio-political consciousness among the non-Brahman educated commercial class. This class was to challenge the Brahmins who held the predominant position in education, administration and culture in the coming decades.¹

The spread of Christianity, which was supposed to be egalitarian, attracted socially discriminated and exploited masses from Tamil Nadu. This class of people and other similarly situated communities expected Christianity and British rule to benefit the Indian national congress which was waging a battle against the British. A section of Tamil society was largely loyal to the British during the freedom struggle.

In the name of supporting Tamil culture and securing other private rights, some non-Brahmin elites viewed Brahmins as the main hindrances in achieving this unity. Therefore, an organized attempt was first made in 1917 by forming the South India Liberal Federation, which later became the Justice Party.² This party leading the cause of non-Brahmins ruled the composite state of Madras for about two decades. Because of Justice Party's social structure was largely elitist in nature, it was no match for a mass organization like the Indian National Congress in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the best years of nationalist struggle. Eventually giving way to an emerging backward class movement launched by E.V.Ramasami in the 1920s, the Justice Party was no more since 1944 when Dravidar Kazhagam (D.K.) was launched. Unlike the Justice Party, E.V. Ramasami had mass appeal. C.N. Annadurai, Kuthusi Gurusamy, M. Karunanidhi, Nedunchezian, Anbazhagan and other energetic leaders developed the party through print and platform as well as on stage. The Dravidar Kazhagam took its origin in the 'Self Respect Movement' which was founded by E.V. Ramasami. Dravidar Kazhagam inherited the rationalist and atheist philosophy of the Self-Respect Movement. It represented self-respect, enrichment of Tamil language, liberation of women, disbelief in God and religion, casteless society etc. It prescribed a rationalist solution to the ills of Tamil society.

Before the formation of Dravidar Kazhagam, the Self-Respect Movement opposed the imposition of other languages on Tamils. It opposed the imposition of Hindi when it was imposed as the language in 125 secondary schools during 1937-1938, by the then Rajaji Ministry in the Madras Presidency.³ The Movement ignited against him and it fought back tooth and nail. In this context, it criticized the Congress Party as the puppet of Aryan culture and Aryan interest, and the imposition of Hindi was an attempt by Congress to strangle the self-respect and dignity of Tamils. Actually, it was the Indian National Congress which, by ignoring the sentiments and other cultural aspirations of different language groups in India, had given room for such criticisms. Thus, the affinity for a language and culture manifested in D.K's opposition to a particular community, the Brahmins and they were ruthlessly branded as Aryans of the historical past.

Socially speaking, there was no such distinct culture that prevailed in Tamil Nadu in the Twentieth Century. It was when some administrative and political opportunities were monopolized by the Brahmins, which of course was not of their guilt, the emerging backward classes thought differently and started fighting the upper caste. It was therefore a battle between two classes for position and profession in the established institution of merit, for prominence and prestige and not a conflict between two different races.

The imposition of Hindi increased racial sentiments and Dravidar Kazhagam was the leading campaigner against Aryans, North Indians and their languages. The result was that the Dravidian movement became loyal to the British by demanding a separate 'Dravida Nadu' comprising the present day four southern states of India.⁴ When the British and Indian National Congress response was indifferent, Dravidar Kazhagam launched an organized movement demanding the separation of Dravida Nadu from 1944 onwards. It was the manifestation of utter disappointment and disgust with the Dravidian leader's demands for a separate identity for the Tamils. The British had a hand in this political development. They wanted to see the Dravidian Movement of this kind become a counterweight to the Indian National Congress. It was indeed a policy of coercion and concession adopted by the British towards Dravidar Kazhagam.

Even within the Indian National Congress there were forces demanding the cultural identity of the Tamils against all other linguistic and cultural domains. This grew out of its opposition to British imperialism and woven into the fabric of Tamil nationalism. Maraimalai Adigal, Thiru .Vi. Kalyanasundaram and others had instilled these ideas in the minds of nationalists.⁵ However, this emerging trend had been relegated to the background as the Congress had focused on the political side of the struggle much more than this Tamil nationalism.

The separate demand for 'Dravida Nadu' was the result of Dravida Kazhagam's quest to achieve cultural identity for Tamils. Subsequent development in the socio-political spheres of Tamil Nadu had proved this assumption. Dravida Kazhagam from the 1940s stated that it was not interested in contesting any election or joining any popular government. The youth of the Dravidian Movement under the energetic leadership of C.N. Annadurai and others were not satisfied with Dravida Kazhagam's stand. The D.K. youth became an emerging group which aspired to political power and wanted to make social changes. When Dravidar Kazhagam leader E.V. Ramasami married Maniammai, Dravida Kazhagam's young supporters strongly protested against this type of marriage of unequal age, which went against the principles of the Movement.⁶ For Dravidar Kazhagam's already dissatisfied youth section, this proved to be an immediate cause for their straight show with their leader. As a result of this, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam arose in 1949, under the leadership of C. N. Annadurai.⁷

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.), unlike its parent organization, believed in elections and contested elections in 1957 State Assembly elections.⁸ Subsequently, it became a mass organization which gave propaganda of the social reform and welfare programs received extensive coverage in his work. For some time till 1967, personality conflicts between Dravidar Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) separated them from being united at least for the common purpose. But when the D.M.K. won the election in 1967⁹ and formed the Ministry in Tamil Nadu, these two parties successfully organized a family reunification.

The D.M.K with the blessing of E.V. Ramasami was able to launch a programme to liquidate Brahmin hegemony in most fields of state activities in Tamil Nadu. By introducing some social reforms, the D.M.K. fulfilled the expectations of the D.K. leader, E.V.Ramasami. After the death of E.V.Ramasami in 1973, the D.K. movement had fallen on dull days.¹⁰ This was partly due to social reform and other welfare measures launched from time to time by welfare governments in India, as well as in Tamil Nadu since independence. The split in Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam gave rise to a new rival political party, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (A.I.A.D.M.K.) in 1972.¹¹ This was launched by M. G. Ramachandran at the matinee- idol turned politician. He ruled Tamil Nadu as Chief Minister for eleven years, from 1977 to 1987.¹² As a matter of fact, both D.M.K. and A.I.A.D.M.K., the offshoots of the Dravidian movement, including its parent organization, had to drop their demands to separate Tamil Nadu and join the national mainstream. One time or another, both factions sided with the Indian National Congress as a matter of political expediency.

To conclude, times are changing, and when the appearance of D.K. it was once considered a historical necessity, today it is no longer a necessity. It is almost as if the Dravidian movement is a spent force, but it is a living force, serving the needs of the people more socially, politically and economically than racially. The relevance of the Dravidian Movement is felt much in South India and the present D.M.K. Government under M.K.Stalin promoted the 'Dravidian Model of Governance', the experiences gained from the rule of the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu in the past. Hence the present aim of the Dravidian Movement is marching towards economic equilibrium and social well-being of the common people in the emerging trends.

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