



E.V.RAMASAMY'S INVOLVEMENT IN GANDHI'S CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME OF KHADI AND TEMPERANCE CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT

In the beginning of his public life, E.V. Ramasamy (E.V.R.) adopted the goals of Congress as his aims. He fully utilized his formative period for building up his image in the Congress and became one of the chief exponents of Gandhi's constructive programme of khadi and temperance and in Tamil Nadu. He fully dedicated during that period his life for the temperance campaign and spread of khadi and the removal of untouchability. He made public speeches in colloquial Tamil and succeeded in arousing awareness of ignorant people. He was well backed by Rajaji, the lieutenant of Gandhi. Rajaji's support and his individual influence among the non-Brahmin leaders and his active role in the Non-Cooperation Movement helped E.V.R.'s position to rise quickly in the hierarchy of Tamil Nadu Congress. In 1920 itself he became the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress. Realising his sincerity and tremendous work in spreading Congress ideals, T.V. Kalyanasundaranar, a prominent Congress leader astonished and praised E.V.R. much. The Congress organization was much pleased to utilize the services of E.V.R., as a self-less social worker and crusader for socio-economic change among the downtrodden.

KEYWORDS: E.V.Ramasami, Gandhi, Rajaji, Congress, Khadi, Temperance, Campaign.

INTRODUCTION :

E.V. Ramasamy (1879-1973), better known as Periyar, a title meaning 'great man' that was conferred on him by the women of Madras at a women conference during his heroic struggle, was a relentless crusader for social order and campaigner against the economic disorder.¹ Rajaji wanted to strengthen Tamil Nadu Congress and showed his interest to draw E.V. Ramasamy into the Congress, for E.V.R. gained much influence and popularity in those days. Moreover, Rajaji thought that E.V.R.'s entry would influence other prominent non-Brahmin leaders. Hence, Rajaji and P. Varadarajulu Naidu approached E.V.R. and urged him to join the Congress not merely to achieve political liberation for the country but to fight against the social disorder prevalent in society. Eventually, on Rajaji's advice, E.V.R. joined the Congress at the end of 1919.²

E.V.R. was drawn to the Congress by Rajaji's words that social reform was a must one which could be achieved only through Gandhi and Congress.³ E.V.R. involved in the Congress activities hoping that social reform and national liberation would be done by the Congress simultaneously.⁴ Freedom of the country, reconstruction of society, eradication of untouchability enforcement of prohibition and spread of khadi, which the Congress advocated agreed with his own views.⁵

On September 1920 a special session of the Congress was convened at Calcutta to approve Gandhi's scheme of Non-Co-operation. After a prolonged discussion, in the regular session of the Congress which was held under the presidentship of C. Vijayaragavachariar at Nagpur in December 1920, the scheme was accepted with popular support. The scheme comprised of constructive and positive programmes. The constructive programme which attracted E.V.R. included the promotion of Swadeshi, particularly the revival

of hand spinning and weaving, promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, and prohibition of the use of alcoholic drinks.⁶ Sincerely and tirelessly, E.V.R. worked for the spread of the ideals of the Congress. Gandhi's plan of non-co-operation was very much appealing to him and he actively participated in it.

TEMPERANCE CAMPAIGN

Udhayasankar, a historian from Chennai observes "Consumption of liquor was in vogue for a long period in India and the revenue accruing from the sale of liquor was high all over the country in the colonial rule. As it affected health, morality and economy of the common people, the Congress determined to fight against this ill of the society. The temperance campaign was vigorously organized by the way of propagating the evils of drinking and by the way of picketing before liquor shops as a part of the constructive programme of the Congress. Throughout the nation, the campaign was very hectic".⁷

When Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu, he stayed in the house of E.V.R. on 25th September 1921 (Gandhi adopted loincloth on 22nd September 1921 at Madurai). He worked for the development of *khadi*, abolition of untouchability and enforcement of prohibitions as a part of the constructive programme of Gandhi and Congress in Tamil Nadu.⁸

In rural Coimbatore, the dominant Gounder members aided by urban Congressmen led an anti-liquor agitation. V.C Vellingiri Gounder, one of the founder leaders of the Gounder Caste Association, joined with Congressmen like N.C. Ramaswami Iyengar and E.V.R. to organize volunteers for the picketing, of liquor shops and the annual auction by which the shops were leased.⁹

E.V.R organized one of the most impressive temperance campaigns in the Madras Province in 1921.¹⁰ In November 1921 he launched a successful temperance campaign at Erode. It was commended by no less than a great person like Gandhi as follows: "Erode alone has done bravely in the matter of temperance. Mr. Ramaswamy Naicker has, therefore, been rewarded with one month's simple imprisonment.¹¹ About a hundred persons were sentenced to short terms of imprisonment under section 188 of Indian Penal code for their acts of disobedience at Erode.¹² To E. V. R, this was the first occasion of Imprisonment.¹³ Following the way of E.V.R his wife Nagammai and his sister Kannammal actively involved in the temperance campaign, and were sentenced to imprisonment.¹⁴ There was an overwhelming response to the campaign.¹⁵ The authorities found it impossible to prevent the rise of the agitators. Anticipating a grave situation they decided to lift the prohibitory order issued under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code.¹⁶ Perhaps this lifting could have been effected only in Erode.¹⁷

KHADI CAMPAIGN

Gandhi advocated the use to *khadi* (hand-woven) cloth there by creating a sense of patriotism among the Indians. The spinning and weaving were no doubt originally intended as a means of economic upliftment of poor sections of the society. It gained political and ethical significance.¹⁸

E.V.R. gave up his costly clothing and began to wear *khadi* clothing. He gave attention to wearing the rough *khadi*.¹⁹ The observation of T.V.Kalyanasundaranar that E.V.R. discarded symbols of richness like costly dress, merry making life, etc., for the sake of the nation and wore simple clothes like a poor man.²⁰ E. V. R. made his wife Nagammai and all members of the family to wear *khadi* cloths. He did not even spare his old mother.²¹ E.V. R realized that by using of *khadi*, he could give a fillip to cottage industries in the country and hardly worked against the British economic interests by boycotting their textiles.²²

To spread *khadi*, E.V.R. continuously toured many parts of Tamil Nadu. He visited with a charka. He carried with him *khadi* cloths and sold them out.²³ Selling out clothes by a rich man like a hawker was indeed a great social service.²⁴

The credit of spreading *khadi* successfully in Tamil Nadu went to E.V.R.²⁵ Impressively, E.V.R used to speak for *khadi* with examples, native wits and statistics.²⁶ E.V.R's explanation on the exploitation of the British by comparing the price of raw cotton and that of the finished product. His clarion call for the use of *khadi* convinced the people much.²⁷

In Coimbatore District, both in Erode and Tiruppur, hand loom industry was thriving and *khadi* also

played a prominent part which became a center for gathering hand spun yarn and *khadi*.²⁸ E.V.R.'s invaluable works were commendable for this achievement.

E.V.R was elected president of the Tamil Nadu branch of the All India Spinners Association, an organization launched to control the retail price and push up the sale of *khadi*.²⁹ In Erode, the Tamil Nadu Congress *Khadi* Vastiralayam was functioning under the supervision of E.V.R.³⁰

Non - Co-operation movement was the first organized national agitation against the British imperialism which exploited the wealth and labour of the ignorant Indian masses. As a part of the movement, during 1921 and 1922, there were campaigns against the consumption of liquor in many parts of Tamil Nadu. The campaign received an overwhelming support from the people of Tamil Nadu. Temperance campaign was considered a way to embarrass the British government and a way to improve the condition of the economically and socially deprived people who were much addicted to drinking liquor.. E. V. R was the chief temperance agitator in Tamil Nadu, E.V.R. along with the batch of Congressmen besides delivering speeches on various platforms, had actively picketed toddy and arrack shops in a peaceful manner in Erode. As a reward for his activities, E. V. R. met rigorous imprisonment and his family women were also involved in the agitation campaign. In the *khadar* movement, an anti - British programme of Congress, E.V.R. was again arrested in early 1924. E. V. R. ran the main *khadar* depot from his own home and he continued as the president of the Tamil Nadu branch of the All - India Spinners Association till 1926. Thus, in the Congress organization, E. V. R almost spent and dedicated his life by involving and promoting the constructive programme of Temple and *Khadar* Campaign in Tamil Nadu

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