

THE IDEOLOGIES OF DMK IN THE ARENA OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL OF TAMILNADU

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This chapter brings out the role of the DMK as a socio-political movement in implementing the Dravidian ideology. This includes inter caste marriage, widow remarriage, popularization of Tamil language and culture, attack on superstitions, temple entry for lower caste people, attack on Brahminism, promotion of humanism and universal theism, social and political awakening through press, drama and cinema. Social Movements play an important role in escalating not only the processes of change, but also in giving direction to social transformation. Social Movements are seen as congruent with social conflict. The term social Movement may be used more restrictively in referring only to collective actions. Of the several kinds of collective actions varying from voting or enrolling membership to participating in processions and meetings, which are the more significant that need to be focused on to understand social movements. It also involves a ticklish issue of numerical strength as well as the nature and level of participation. Similarly, should one take the time span of collective action in studying social movements. Collective actions pass through several stages from direct confrontation with the State/dominant groups/ideology/policy, having tangible mobilization with deliberate participation to institutionalized behaviour. More often than not such questions are not interrogated and all kinds of collective action are labelled under the fabric of social movements. In this context, social movements as those purposive collective mobilization informed of an ideology to promote change or stability, using any means, violent or non-violent, and functioning within atleast an elementary organizational framework. Social movements in a society are conditioned by three factors: its core institutional order; the principal enemy as perceived by the deprived; and the primary goal pursued by the society.¹

THE FOUNDATIONS

Though the DMK owes much to Periyar, there is enough difference between Annadurai and Periyar in understanding the political society. Periyar was not a liberal to give place to public opinion or democracy in the context of social movement. But, Annadurai differed in accommodating these values in his ideas, despite his radical outlook in his early years. By birth Annadurai was a Hindu. The Murugan of the Tiruttani hill temple was his family deity. Though he initially belonged to the openly atheist Dravidar Kazhagam he later nuanced his stance towards theism as 'One race, One God' (Onrae Kulam Oruvanae Devan). Annadurai would attack superstitions and religious exploitation but would never fight against the spiritual values of society. He once explained his stance towards god and religion as 'I do not break coconuts for Pillaiyar, neither do I break his idols.'² (Nan Thengayum udaipathillai, Pillaiyaraikum Udaipathillai, cited in Wikipedia, 'C.N. Annadurai').

Annadurai's interest in politics made him join the Justice party in 1935. The party had been in power in Madras Presidency since Self-Governance was introduced in 1920, until it was defeated by the Indian National Congress in 1937. By the time Annadurai joined the Justice party, Annadurai served as the sub-editor of the 'Justice' magazine. He later became the editor for Viduthalai and was also associated

with the Tamil weekly paper, Kudi Arasu. He started his own journal Dravida Nadu, named after the Dravida Nadu an independent state. In 1944, Periyar renamed the Justice party as Dravidar Kazhagam and gave up contesting in the elections.³

The Indian National Congress, which had been fighting for the independence of India from colonial British rule, was dominated by Brahmins. Periyar assumed that independent India would bring South Indians, especially Tamils, under the dominance of Brahmins and North Indians. For these reasons Periyar called for 15th August 1947, the day of Indian independence, to be a day of mourning. Annadurai opposed this move, and the schism between his supporters and Periyar widened. He saw the gaining of independence as an overall achievement of India rather than solely that of Aryan North. Moreover Periyar's decision on giving up participating in democratic elections was also opposed by Annadurai, in reaction to which he walked out of a party meeting in 1948. Periyar considered that candidates in elections must compromise their ideologies. Moreover, it was Periyar's idea that social reformation can be better achieved outside politics, through education and canvassing the masses, rather than governments. Eventually, when Periyar married Maniammai, who was 40 years younger than him, the personal differences between Annadurai and Periyar split their supporters.

Annadurai launched his own party with his party fragment, along with E. V. K. Sampath. He is Periyar's nephew and until then considered his political heir. The new party was named Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. DMK's presence was initially restricted to urban centres and its surrounding areas. But by appealing to the urban lower, lower middle and working classes, students, Dalits and lower castes, Annadurai was able to accelerate its growth and spread. He fought for the social justice of the lower castes and thus rapidly gained popular support.

Though Annadurai left Periyar and started a new party, he could not get away from the influence of Periyar's ideas and personality. He kept vacant the leadership of the DMK for Periyar. He declared that Periyar was still his leader. He further declared that his future plans would be on the line of Periyar's expectations as well as on the line of welfare of the people.

SELF-RESPECT

The ideology of the DMK has its own retrospective genesis in the Self-Respect Movement of Periyar in which Annadurai himself greatly involved. Periyar was convinced that if man developed Self-Respect, he would automatically develop individuality and would refuse to be led by the nose by schemers. One of his most known quotes on Self-Respect was, "we are fit to think of 'Self-Respect' only when the notion of 'superior' and 'inferior' caste is banished from our land".⁴ Periyar did not expect personal or material gain out of this movement. He used to recall in a very casual manner that as a human being, he also was obligated to this duty, as it was the right and freedom to choose this work. Thus, Periyar opted to engage himself in starting and promoting the movement.⁵ Periyar declared that the Self-Respect Movement alone could be the genuine freedom movement, and political freedom would not be fruitful without individual Self-Respect. He remarked that the so called 'Indian freedom fighters' were showing disrespect of Self-Respect, and this was really an irrational philosophy.

Periyar observed that political freedom as conceived by nationalists not excluding even Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru did not cover individual Self-Respect. To him neither revival of the original spirit of Hindu religion and ancient traditions which formed part of Gandhi's conception of freedom, nor complete liberation from the British rule which was considered by Nehru to be the meaning of freedom or

both of them together could ensure individual self-respect or remove the ills from Indian societies. In his opinion the task of fulfilling the need for self-Respect would have to be faced whatever be the extent of political freedom gained. Pointing out that even the British monarch in a sovereign independent nation had no freedom to marry a person of his choice and had to abdicate his kingdom, Periyar raised a question whether Gandhi's vision of freedom or Nehru's concept of independence contained even an iota of individual Self-Respect.

Periyar believed that Self-Respect was as valuable as life itself and its protection is a birth right and not swaraj ('political freedom'). He described the movement as Arivu Vidutalai Iyakkam, that is, a movement to liberate the intellect. The terms tan-maanam or suya mariyadhai meaning 'Self-Respect' are traceable in ancient Tamil literature considered a virtue of high valour in Tamil society. Periyar once claimed that to describe the ideology of his movement, no dictionary in the entire world, implying that no other language, could provide a word better than or equal to suya mariyadai. Started as a movement to promote rational behaviour, the Self-Respect Movement acquired much wider connotation within a short period of time. Periyar speaking with M.K. Reddy at the First Self-Respect Conference held in 1929 explained the significance of Self-Respect and its principles. The main tenets of the Self-Respect Movement in society were to be: no kind of inequality among people; no difference as rich and poor in the economic life; men and women to be treated as equals in every respect without differences; attachments to caste, religion, varna, and country to be eradicated from society with a prevalent friendship and unity around the world; and every human being seeing to act according to reason, understanding, desire, and perspective, and shall not be subject to slavery of any kind or manner.⁶

Equality with stress on economic and social equality formed the central theme of the Self-Respect Movement due to Periyar's determination to fight the inequalities ingrained in the caste system and religious practices. Working on the theme of liberating the society from the baneful social practices perpetrated in the name of dharma and karma, Periyar developed the idea of establishing this movement as the instrument for achieving his objective.⁷

One of the major sociological changes introduced through the self respect movement was the Self-Respect marriage system, whereby marriages were conducted without being officiated by a Brahmin priest. Periyar had regarded that the then conventional marriages were mere financial arrangements and often caused great debt through dowry. Self-Respect marriages encouraged inter-caste marriages and arranged marriages to be replaced by love marriages. It was argued by the proponents of Self-Respect marriage that the then conventional marriages were officiated by Brahmins, who has to be paid for and also the marriage ceremony was in Sanskrit which most people did not understand, and hence were ritual and practices based on blind adherence.⁸

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