CHAPTER IV

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During the British Rule, The Indian National Congress encouraged the involvement of stage and screen artistes in the National Movement and with their help roused patriotic feelings among the rural masses. Films, filmsongs and film dialogues on national themes were received enthusiastically by the people. The film as a medium helped in the active and emotional involvement of the actors and the audience in the freedom struggle. However, after independence which was perhaps the sole goal of the Congress party, the film and stage artistes failed to get the same patronage from the party. Neither the leaders of the party showed a keen interest in involving film artistes in the party politics, nor did the artistes find in the Congress party a congenial atmosphere for the fulfilment of their ambitions, now that Independence had been achieved. The Congress party, which had a mass base did not find the need to make use of the medium of the film for political purposes for they thought of the medium as fundamentally a medium of entertainment. This perhaps was a sad misconception on the part of the Congress party which later proved to be a colossal blunder leading to loss of political power.
The beginning of the immediate post-Independent era marked the emergence of the already popular Dravidian Movement as a powerful force in the politics of Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian Movement which styled itself as a Self-Respect Movement was basically rationalist in outlook. The powerful advocacy of the rationalist philosophy of this party by leaders like E.V.R. and C.N.A. had a powerful impact particularly on the youth of the caste-ridden society. The Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) did not claim itself to be a political party with the aim of capturing political power, but it appeared to millions of people in Tamil Nadu as a rationalist party with revolutionary social ideas hitherto unheard of. Gradually it acquired great strength by bringing within its fold young man of varied talents and rare capabilities, like C.N. Annadurai, E.V.K. Sampath, N.V.Natarajan, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, M. Karunanidhi, K.A. Mathiazhagan, C.P. Sitrarasu, A.V.P. Asaithambi and so on. The main source of the strength of this Party was the oratorical and rhetorical power wielded by its leaders, who were able to sway the masses by their speeches. C.N.A. perfected a new style of oratory which charmed the audience and kept them spell bound. Followers of C.N.A. like Karunanidhi evolved their own techniques of persuasion and soon the party had in its fold a galaxy of star speakers with remarkable rhetorical skill. Under the leadership of E.V.R. all these lieutenants and
sub-lieutenants visited almost every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. Their poetic and alliterative speeches carried their message to the rural masses. The Movement took a literary and linguistic turn and brought about a Tamil Renaissance and developed interest and pride in the rich Tamil heritage. Both C.N.A. and M. Karunanidhi were gifted orators who could keep audiences of any kind spell bound for any length of time. In fact thousands and thousands of eager audiences waiting for hours together for the arrival of their favourite speakers used to be common sight in any part of Tamil Nadu whether city or town or village or hamlet.

Another source of strength for the DK was the medium of the press through which it could communicate its message to the masses. The party had established a few journals like "Puratchi" (Revolution), "Kudiyarasu" (Republic) and "Viduthalai" (Freedom) edited and published by E.V.R. himself. Later C.N.A. became the sub-editor of "Viduthalai". The official press concentrated on the message of the party, particularly its socio-economic policies like atheism, rationalism, anti-Brahmanism, freedom for women, widow remarriage, removal of untouchability and child marriage, removal of social barriers on temple entry to all, prohibition, Dravidanaadu, later Tamil Nadu, provincial autonomy and the like.
Another medium that was used by the DK especially by C.N.A. was that of the stage. C.N.A. had to his credit a number of plays like "Velaikkaari", "Ore Eravu" and "Nallathambi". Incidentally, "Nallathambi", which N.S.K. acted and produced, was the first film for which C.N.A. provided the story and script. "Nallathambi" which was not only a successful stage play, later was even more successful social film with a progressive and revolutionary reformist message. Perhaps it was the first film that daringly lashed at supersitious social taboos and advocated a rationalist outlook. Thus the DK made use of a number of communication media available for communicating to the masses.

Later when the DMK was born, it drew from the DK the most outstanding and talented orators and writers who exploited all the media especially that of the film more effectively than the Congress party and the DK, where the Congress missed the way, the Dravidian parties picked it up.

One of the chief factors that brought rapid political development in Tamil Nadu was the regional politics articulated by the Dravidian Movement and the political parties that drew inspiration from this movement. The issues which provided the base for the development of regional politics are i) race and ii) language. On these issues emerged the slogan "Dravida Naadu Dravidarukke" meaning
"Dravidasthaan for Dravidians". This chapter explains the emergence of the Dravidian Movement and how the movement used film as a powerful medium to propagate its ideas to win mass support and to capture political power finally. But it is interesting to note that its demand for a separated Dravidasthaan was abandoned halfway though.

In the first decade of this century there occurred a clear division between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins mainly on political matters and the question of educational opportunity and government employment. In the light of the rediscovered Tamil literature, the non-Brahmins put forward the view that the whole Tamil land including those of the Sangam age had a homogeneous social group with one language, one origin and one culture. Caste system based on 'Varna' theory was an alien concept introduced later by the Aryans. Hence, they attempted to interpret

   The question of Brahmin and non-Brahmin was not debated as a matter of social reform only but raised itself as a political question and the political contest seems to have divided the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin even during the last decade of the last century.


the Aryan civilization as caste-ridden, feudalistic and hierarchical and the Dravidian civilization as egalitarian, democratic and progressive. Thus the gap between the two races widened with the passing years.

Between 1908 and 1915 there were signs of a new awakening among the non-Brahmin leaders; some of them began to think seriously about social divisions which might prevent political cohesion. As early as 1909 an attempt was made in Madras City by two lawyers, P. Subramaniam and M. Purushotham Naidu to form an organisation called "The Madras Non-Brahmin Association" though no efforts were reported regarding the formation of the Association. In 1912, a group of non-Brahmin government employees and some interested non-Brahmins formed "The Madras United League" for the purpose of ventilating their grievances collectively. Later on, the 'League' changed its name as the "Madras Dravidian Association", and one of the important achievements of the Association was the establishment of a

4. Saraswathi, S., op. cit., p. 60
6. Ibid., p. 166.
7. The Madras Dravidian Association was wound up in 1916.
hostel in Madras for non-Brahmin Students in July 1916 by Dr. Natesa Mudiali, who was its Secretary. As the Association became popular among the non-Brahmin politicians, leaders like Sir P. Thiagaraja Chetty (1852-1925) and Dr. T. N. Nair (1868-1919) held a meeting of thirty members in November 1916 and it resolved to start a company, "South Indian People's Association" for primarily publishing newspapers advocating the cause of the non-Brahmin community, because the English daily 'Hindu' of S. Kasthuri Aiyangar and the only Tamil daily "Swadesamitran" of A. Rangaswamy Aiyangar were Brahmin-dominated and highly nationalistic in spirit vigorously advocating Home Rule. The first issue of the Association's English daily "Justice" appeared on February 26, 1917, and the Tamil daily "Dravidan" in June 1917. The political party organized by the "South Indian People's Association" was named as the "South Indian Liberal Foundation" which later came to be popularly known as the "Justice Party" after the English daily "Justice". The "Justice Party" successfully contested the election in 1920 and assumed power as the first elected Government in the province of Madras. 8


Over the centuries, South India had seen many small kingdoms, but only the British during their colonial rule, put together piece by piece over forty years and formed the so called Madras Presidency which became the largest province of British India. It lay along the coramandel coast which contained half the coast line of the entire sub-continent. It spanned both the east and the west of the peninsula and it stretched from cape Comorine to the Hills of Orissa.
This was the time when the Nationalist Movement was gaining ground. Also Gandhiji had already been accepted as the popular leader and the unquestioned in charge of the struggle for freedom. The Home Rule led by Annie Besant also commanded considerable respect.

The Justice Party could not gain a popular base it expected to create because it was regarded as a group of loyalists to the British and its leaders were mostly wealthy Zamindars who had little touch with the common man. Under the circumstances Gandhiji enjoyed the sole confidence of the masses.

The Justice Party, defeated by Swarajists in the 1926 elections, however remained an anti-Brahmin force in Madras politics. E.V. Ramasamy (E.V.R.), a prominent leader of the Congress Party began to associate himself with the Justice Party in 1925 and soon emerged as its leader in 1936.

His Self-Respect Movement started in 1925 gave a new dimension and militant outlook and approach to

11. Ibid., p. LXXXIV.
the party in 1937. He led an agitation against C. Rajagopa-
chari's Congress Government for making Hindi a compulsory
subject in the school curriculam. The Justice Party
opposed Hindi, as the language of the Aryan imperialists
and began in 1938 to demand a separate and independent
Dravidian state comprising the present Andhra Pradesh,
Karnataka, Madras and Kerala States. In order to propagate
his ideas and collect mass support, E.V.R. edited and
published Tamil journals such as "Puratchi", "Viduthalai"
and "Kudiyarasu". The demand for a separate Dravidanaadu

13. Iqbal Narain, "State Politics in India", Meenakshi
Prakashan, Delhi, 1976. p. 408. "The South Indian
languages differ from Hindi as radically as the land
administration system which had ryotwari with South
and Zamindari and Mehalberi in the North. Add to
this the Montague Chelmsford Communal award and
partial implementation of Gandhi's stand on the
language issue and we come to realise how Madras
got isolated from the National stream of life."

14. Asher, A.E., "Dravidian Separativeness. Invention or
Reality", South Asian Review, Vol.6 No.6, October,
1972, pp. 33 and 40. "There is no doubt that at a
superficial level South India as difficult from the
North India whether it be a question of natural
scenery or the results of human skills intellect or
aesthetic sense, it is impossible to be in South
India and think one is elsewhere. Temple architecture,
music, forms, drama, social customs, styles of
dress - none can be confused with those of the rest
of the sub-continent. If all the rationalities that
make up the Indian Union are unique, Tamil is more
unique than the rest". Also see Robert L, Hardgrave
Jr., "Dravidian Movement", Popular Prakashan,
Bombay, 1965, p. 27.
Movement became more pronounced and articulate with the coming into the Movement of C.N. Annadurai in 1935.  

Dissatisfied with the Justice Party leadership because of its loyalty to the foreign rule, C.N.A., urged the leaders at the Salem Conference of 1944 to take a more open stand of defiance against the British Raj. He also brought out a resolution for changing the name of the Justice Party as the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). Both these moves were resented by the wealthier non-Brahmin leaders of the Justice Party. Nevertheless the resolution was adopted and the DK was born in 1944. Those leaders of the Justice Party who could fall in line with C.N.A. and E.V.R. left the party and thus lost their main sources of financial support. C.N. Annadurai suggested that the party could raise funds through stage performances. This proved an effective source not only in terms of finance but also as a means to reach the masses. A useful by-product of the process was the development of a new Tamil literary style.

15. C.N. Annadurai was born on September 15, 1909 at Conjeevaram near Madras. He was an M.A. in Economics and he did law for some time but later turned to journalism for which he had a natural flair.

In 1945 the DK adopted a constitution and a flag of its own. E.V.R. and C.N.A. aroused the Dravidian sentiment and gave it political manifestation through the DK. Thus the cultural and racial fact was projected, as an important plant in the day-to-day programme of the party. Many young people who joined the party, with little formal education, were encouraged to produce party literature, which was partly propaganda and partly an outlet for their artistic expression. The literary output of a growing number of gifted young leaders of the DK produced what may be called a cultural revival. It has succeeded in initiating a progressive movement of "New writing" in Tamil, developing a characteristic style of expression and vocabulary.

C.N. Annadurai spoke and wrote at length in powerful Tamil, setting forth a scholarly analysis of the economic situation in South India, suggesting remedial measures. He followed closely the Marxist analysis to which he made constant reference. But there were significant deviations. He divided society into three classes. In between the bourgeois and the proletariat he conceived a middle class which was neither capitalistic nor labour, but represented the consumers, whom he expected to naturally side with the labour. Another deviation was Annadurai's theory that economic progress is possible only after social emancipation of the Dravidians from the Aryans. He dilated at length on
the exploitation of the South by the North Indians. He held
the Brahmins of the South solely responsible for keeping the
Dravidian race down in society.

The Self-Respect Movement started by E.V.R. in 1925 had in its fold drama troupes which used to stage
dramas during and after party conferences, projecting anti-
Brahmin and anti-North Indian feelings. Though E.V.R.himself
was a strong critic of drama and cinema, he himself had to
see some of the dramas staged for raising party funds and
for propagating the Self-Respect ideas. His able stewards
like C.N.A., M. Karunanidhi, A.V.P. Asaithambi, Bharathidasan
and M.R. Radha were some of the good dramatists and actors,
who helped in propagating the ideas of the party through
the stage.

Of the artistes, M.R. Radha (M.R.R.) was
the only notable actor who stuck to the DK till his death.
Most dialogues in his plays were powerful personal attacks
aimed at specific personalities. Radha had the rare
ability of producing instant dialogues (on the stage) so as
to suit the place, time, personalities and issues at stake.
He was an ardent follower of E.V.R. He was popular both as
a stage as well as a film actor. "Raththakanneer" and
"Keemayanam" were some of his popular dramas which carried
rational ideas of the Self-Respect Movement and attacked
the political and social evils of the day. He left home
at the age of 7 and joined a drama company run by Alandur Rangasamy Naidu for a monthly salary of Rs.5/-\textsuperscript{17}. After spending a considerable number of years he left Rangasamy Naidu's drama company for personal reasons and acted in Somanna Iyer Company and Ceylon Sahib Company. Finally he joined the Balameena Ranjani Sangeetha Sabha of Jagannatha Iyer. Jagannatha Iyer, a Brahmin by caste was a revolutionary from whom M.R.R. inherited his revolutionary ideas. M.R.R. served in this company for 15 years and left only when it was dissolved. After a few months Jagannatha Iyer's son Ramasubbu started a drama company called "Balamohan Ranchitha Sabha". M.R.R. came back and acted in Ramasubbu's company and left it for personal reasons. Then he acted in Original Boys' Company and Rajammal Company and finally joined the PonnuSwamy Pillai's Company. During this time, he had opportunities to act in films like "Rajasekaran", "Santhanam Thevan", "Sathiavani", "Bombay Mail", "Sogo Mour". But he loved acting in drama more than in films. So he continued acting in dramas for three years till he made a second entry into Tamil films through "Raththakanneer", (Tears of Blood) one of the box office hits. As his dramas carried Self-Respect and revolutionary ideas there was great opposition for his dramas during his days. For example, "Porval"(Sword)

\textsuperscript{17.} Sivagangai Varmath, "Vaiyagapperu Nadigaru, Nadigavel M.R. Radha - Life History", Rani Pathippagam, Madras 1962, p. 52.
was prohibited by the Government of Madras when T. Prakasam was the Chief Minister of Madras. But, M.R.R. used to stage the same drama under different titles, for example, "Ramayanam" as "Keemayanam". "Raththakanner" was the most popular satiric play which boosted the image and popularity of M.R.R. in Tamil Nadu. In "Raththkanner", directed by Krishnan and Panju, M.R.R. portrayed different characters of a modern man, a womaniser, a drunkard, a leper, a blind man, a beggar and so on. His "Ramayanam" or "Keemayanam" raised a big controversy and even opposition from the public for portraying "Rama" as a drunkard and "Sita" as an adultress. "Ramayanam" was prohibited but when he staged the drama he was arrested on the stage itself and sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment. On hearing about dramas like "Keemayanam" staged in the Madras State, Nehru himself had said that the people of South India were scared that the Northeners would make the Dravidians as slaves. In his "Lakshmikanthan", M.R.Radha portrayed the different types of thieves that could be seen in the society. After "Raththakanneer" he again stopped acting in cinema. The next film after "Raththakanneer" was "Nallayidathu Sambandam". He subsequently acted in a number of films.

some of which are mentioned below:


E.V.R.'s attachment to M.R.R. was so great that E.V.R. who was opposed to films went to the extent of seeing and enjoying M.R.R.' "Raththakanneer", perhaps the only Tamil picture that E.V.R. had seen. E.V.R. had presided over some of the dramas staged by M.R.R. M.R.Radha used to lead the rallies organized by DK, by riding on a horse back. At a time when the DK had found very difficult to propagate its ideas, it was M.R.R. who was very courageous and overcame many an opposition in staging his dramas. His love and affection for E.V.R. was so great that he was wearing a pendant with E.V.R.'s photo.

Though he was a controversial political personality his dramas were presided over and appreciated by various political leaders like Sir.C.P. Raman, Varatharajulu Naidu, and P. Jeevanandam who commended him for his excellent acting and the social themes effectively conveyed
in his dramas. He was conferred titles such as "Nadigavel Radha" (King of Acting) and "Vaiyagapperu Nadigar" (World's Best Actor).

His film career, however, came to an abrupt end in 1967, just before the General Elections, following his attempt on the life of M.G.R.

In the First General Election in 1952, the DK did not contest. But it actively supported the Communist Party, which won 16 out of the 50 seats it had contested. In that process, the strength of the DK was revealed in that 13 candidates supported by the DK were among the 16 successful Communist candidates. The DK-Communist alliance was based on the following points of agreement as indicated in "Cross Roads", the official organ of the CPI. (i) The DK stood for replacing the Congress Raj (ii) It was fighting for civil liberation (iii) It supported workers and peasant struggles and (iv) It was a friend of the USSR, People's China and the Liberation Movement in Asia. However, the two parties differed by Communist diagnosis, in that the CPI was opposed to the anti-Brahminism of the DK and it did not agree with the goal of Dravidasthan. 19 The Communist-DK

alliance was short-lived, because of the fact that the CPI was Brahmin dominated. The DK, right from the beginning had maintained its stand of not contesting an election with the view of capturing political power. However, it had been active during elections supporting one party or the other. Thus in the second General Election in 1957 and the subsequent elections till 1967 it lent its support to the Congress Party.

Although the DK could not boast of any achievements on the political front, it has been instrumental in bringing about a social and political awareness among the people of Tamil Nadu. The DK, through its organizational units in every district and taluk in the Madras State sold the message of Tamil Nationality to the masses. Through dramas staged even in the most isolated villages, through the voluminous literature and the inflammatory speeches of its leaders the Movement was able to bring about a militant and self-conscious awareness of identity among the Tamil Community.

While the Congress Party was partially successful in its half-hearted attempt to use the medium of the film for political purposes it can be said that the DK

20. Ibid., p. 42.
found this medium suitable for effectively communicating its message to the masses and for bringing about social changes and creating a new political awareness.

C.N.A. and M. Karunanidhi of the DK were the pioneers in this field of propaganda film. For the first time in the history of Tamil films they dealt with social themes hitherto untouched. Their gripping dialogues revolutionized the Tamil film world with a new vibration. In this process they set a new trend in the successful tapping of this medium for political purposes. Just as this trend was taking firm roots, a major political development took place in Tamil Nadu when a new political party, namely, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was born out of the DK owing to ideological differences between E.V.R. on the one hand and a number of his lieutenants led by C.N.A. on the other hand.

(When the DMK was founded it had the advantage of having within its fold a number of talented men who had already established themselves as gifted orators, writers and actors.) As a new political party with ambitions of capturing political power the DMK had to go a long way and in this stupendous task the varied talent of these gifted men and their proven experience in various media of communication especially in the film world stood them in
good stead. If these men, as members of the DK succeeded in tapping the medium of the film as a potential means of political power, they, after founding a party of their own, the DMK, succeeded in exploiting the medium to the fullest extent for capturing political power.

The DMK and its leaders had conceived a definite role for films in their political maneuvers. This can be seen in the very words of C.N. Annadurai himself when he said after seeing the English movie "Pride and Passion" that if he could succeed in making four films like "Pride and Passion" he would have had almost got the Dravidasthan which was the life of the DMK. 21

On another occasion just before the General Elections 1962, he remarked to his friends that if he were permitted to make a film which would not be censored by the ruling power of that day (Congress Party) he would succeed in demonstrating how a single film could topple a well-established Congress Government in Tamil Nadu. 22

Politics in Tamil Nadu has been inextricably bound up with the cinema ever since the DMK emerged as a political party. C.N.A. was primarily responsible for


bringing the masses and cinema into the scope of active party politics. Hence the DMK can be said to have effectively employed the cinema for propagating its social and political ideas as well as for gaining political power.

In 1949, C.N.A., E.V.R.'s lieutenant, left the party to found the DMK because he and his followers in the DK did not agree with E.V.R. on many issues. They were opposed to E.V.R.'s autocratic style of conducting the affairs of the party. Secondly, E.V.R.'s call to observe Independence Day, August 15, 1947, as mourning day was not acceptable to C.N.A. and his followers. What added fuel to the fire was the marriage of their 72 year-old leader E.V.R. with a 28 year-old party worker, Maniammai, which proved to be the last straw in the camel's bag, and C.N.A. and his followers parted company with E.V.R. Other minor issues like using the party for raising funds for individuals like Bharathidasan and Panneerselvam also aggravated the difference of opinion between E.V.R. and C.N.A. Thus on a rainy evening of September 17, 1949 (Birthday of E.V.R.) in the Robinson Park of North Madras, was founded the party called the DMK.²³

When the DMK was founded a large number of actors and script writers associated with the Tamil film

world came to the fold of the DMK. Mention may be made of actors like K.R. Ramasamy (K.R.R.), N.S.Krishnan (N.S.K.), D.V. Narayanasamy and writers like N. Karunanidhi, A.V.P. Asaithambi, Rama Arangannal, A.K. Velan, Kannadasan and so on.

The active participation of the members of the DMK in the film industry lent a new dimension to the revival of the Tamil culture, and Tamil language and the development of a new kind of literature all of which was projected as a kind of anti-thesis to the Sanskrit culture and thought. The dialogues of the films were in pure Tamil, free from Sanskrit influence, and tried to assert the dignity of the Dravidian Movement as opposed to the Aryan dominated social values.

C.N.A., the architect of the DMK was a versatile genius. His genius lay in his quick understanding of the magic strength of the theatre and of the film as a vehicle of political propaganda (Appendix-XV & XVI). The master-minded architect of the DMK had already conceived the designs of the lines on which his new party would develop. He made innovations in political communication, by introducing symbols and references pertaining to the party which were liberally used in the medium of the films and plays.)
Until C.N.A. had revolutionized it with new social themes, the Tamil stage had been monopolised by only mythological themes, because of a notion that people would enjoy only mythological dramas. However, the 1920s had witnessed a change in the trend of the Tamil stage from mythological to social. The Madurai Original Boys' Company and Pavalar Boys Company were responsible for bringing in this change by staging novel plays like "Manoharan", "Rajammal", "Chandrakantha", "Kovalar Thalaivan", "Rathnavali" and so on. Later on, Congress Party men like Sathavathenam and T. Krishnaswamy Pavalar, staged dramas like "Katharin Vetri", "Thesakkodi", "Pathibakthi" to propagate nationalist ideas. As people of that time were very much involved in the Independence struggle, these dramas were popularly supported and appreciated by them. Though these dramas brought some change in the field of stage they did not seek to preach rational ideas. Even Pammal Sammantha Mudaliar, known as the father of the Tamil Stage, did not try plays with rationalistic themes. His themes were mainly entertainment oriented.

But it was C.N.A. who sowed the seeds of rationalism and the ideas of Self-Respect Movement in the field of Tamil Stage. He successfully brought out these ideas through the plays like "Chandrothayam", "Chandramohan", "Velaikkari", "Ore Eravu", "Neethi Thevan Mayakkam", 
"Kaalumamtha Kasadar" and so on, which set about a new phase in the field of Tamil stage. It has only after these plays that a real change took place in the field of Tamil stage.

Besides being a dramatist, C.N.A. was a good actor himself. T.K. Shanmugam, a great stage actor himself, praised C.N.A. after seeing his play "Chandrothayam" in 1943. He remarked that if C.N. Annadurai continued to act, professional actors like himself might have to leave the stage. "Chandrothayam" was C.N.A.'s first drama staged on June 5, 1943 at Thirumangalam, presided over by Bharathidasan. In "Chandrothayam", C.N.A. preached the ideas that the property of temples must be used for public welfare, that the Government must be the friend of labourers, that widows should be allowed remarriage, and that there should be encouragement for self-respect marriages. He played the role of a Zamindar (big landlord) in "Chandrothayam" and that of "Kagappat" in "Chandramohan" or "Sivaji Kanda Hindu Samrajyam". The latter play portrayed the evils of the Aryan influence on the society and state. In "Neethithevan Mayekkam", he played the role of "Ravanam".


By himself acting in plays, he lent dignity to stage artistes. His dramas were so good that even people in the opposite camp appreciated his talents. For example, 'Kalki' R. Krishnamurthy who reviewed "Ore Eravu", in his journal, praised C.N.A. as the Bernard Shaw and Ibsen of the South. 26

His dramas were concerned with the current political problems and explained the stand of the DMK, on those issues. For example, in his play "Kanneer Thuli" he countered the accusations made by E.V.R. who referred to C.N. Annadurai and his followers as "Kanneer Thuligal" (tear drops). His drama "Nankodai" written in 1964 was a political satire in which he vehemently attacked the Congress Party. It explained how the Congressmen were corrupt and how they were different from the Congressmen who had fought for the freedom of the country. In "Jananayaka Sarvaathikaari" he explained how the people who had come to power in the name of democracy had misused their power and how they had gone even to the extent of interfering with the independence of the judiciary which had resulted in the denial of justice to the people. In "Ithayam Venrida" he explained how the Congress Party had cleverly brought into its fold the capitalists, landlords and rich people during the election

and the Congress Party's plot against other parties to win the election. He had also written a number of one-act plays which were based on the day-to-day politics of Tamil Nadu. In 1969, before his death, he wrote a one-act play "Bharatham" based on an incident in which Kosamy, an MLÁE was attacked by some Bengalis at Silikuri Railway Station while he was returning from Bengal during the then Assam crisis.

(C.N.A. was not only a dramatist, but also a good critic of drama.) (His review of "Kumasthavin Penn", staged by T.K.S. Brothers, was published in "Viduthalai" (Freedom) in 1940. He remarked in one of his public speeches on the theme "Kalaiyin Nilamai" (the state of art) in Erode on February 11, 1944 that the dramas should portray the real social problems and expose superstitions. (He believed that drama could play a role in bringing about a political change. He had very great love, care, respect and regard for stage and cinema actors.) (The scheme launched for taking care of the stage actors 27 and the unveiling of the statue of N.S. Krishnan on January 14, 1969 only show his soft corner for film and stage artistes.) It was only after C.N.A.'s

27. C.N.A. proposed that each producer of the Tamil film came forward to donate Rs.10,000 for each film for the development of drama. Like-wise the Government of Tamil Nadu would willingly contribute an equal share for the purpose.
dramas that M.R. Radha started staging dramas like "Porval", "Thookkumedai", "Raththakanneer" with the ideas of the Self-Respect Movement as their themes. And also other drama companies started staging dramas with reformist themes like "Mullil Roja", "Vuyiroviyam", "Anthamaan Kaithi", K.R. Ramasamy, one of the popular film actors of the DMK staged "Ore Eravu" and "Velaikkari" written by C.N.A., continuously for 50 weeks. In all the conferences of the DMK, C.N.A.'s dramas were acted by S.S. Rajendran, K.R. Ramasamy, N.S. Krishnan, Sivaji Ganesan and M.G. Ramachandran. He also encouraged members of his party to write and act in dramas propagating the ideas of his party. For instance in his play "Kalsumantha Kasadar" he made V.R. Nedunchezian, M. Karunanidhi, E.V.K. Sampath and Kannadasan to take roles during DMK conference in 1950. C.N.A. believed that dramas based on party ideals could be used to entertain in a meaningful way the members of the party during the nights when the party conferences were held. "Chandrothayam" was one such play written with this ideal in mind. C.N.A. himself acted in this play along with his colleagues during party conferences. His dramas, most of them published in "Dravida Nadu" greatly helped his party grow in strength.


His dramas also helped the DMK artistes during the time of their crisis. [For instance he wrote "Nallathambi" to render financial help to N.S.K. who had just then been acquitted in a murder case.]

As his dramas became very popular, film producers approached him to write script for films. ["Nallathambi" which had been staged by N.S.K. a number of times, was produced as a film by the Uma Pictures and N.S.K. Films and C.N.A. wrote the script for this film. This was the first script that C.N.A. wrote for a film, which was released on February 2, 1949. It did not contain much of DK ideology but the very entry of C.N.A. gave popularity to him and to the party. His script set a new style and trend in Tamil films.] The film was a passionate and powerful propaganda against alcoholism and in favour of Prohibition policy. It also strongly advocated the abolition of the Zamindari system and the eradication of untouchability. A "Theiukkoothu" (Street Drama) scene in the movie portrayed the evils of alcohol and a recital through a song sequence (known as Kalatshebam) propagated the ideas of Gandhi on untouchability.

Another popular drama of C.N.A. made into a film was "Velaikkari" (February 25, 1949). It was noted for its powerful dialogues. It brought out the inherent greatness of C.N.A. as a social thinker who could look at
local problems with a global vision. Through the film he was able to convey the elementary principles of socialism which he had comprehended and had the courage to stress the vital Marxian doctrine that the society should depend upon its own labour for its progress and not upon some unknown superhuman factor. He attacked the religious dogmas vehemently through this film but he was able to do it with a sense of grace and tolerance. He stressed the irrelevance of caste system, the harmful nature of religious bigotry and the need to care for and believe in the dignity of labour for sustained social development.

"Velaikkari" was noted not only for its success as a box office hit but also as a movie that revolutionised the Tamil cinema. The Tamil silver screen had not known a film of this kind before. The film also was remarkable for C.N.A.'s open and daring criticism of the way the judiciary was functioning without being of much utility to the poor and the downtrodden in society in its sole objective of administration of justice. A particular dialogue in Tamil runs as follows:

Sattam Enbathu Oru Iruttarai,
Athil Vakkeelin Vaatham Oru Vilakku,
Yezhaigal Peramudiyaatha Vilakku
meaning "Law is a dark room, the argument of a lawyer is a light which the poor cannot get". Thus the film "Velaikkari",

while establishing C.N.A. as a popular script writer proved to be a turning point in the history of Tamil Cinema.

Another box office hit of C.N.A. which also carried the social and political ideas of the DMK was "Ore Eravu" (A Night). In this film which deals with the nocturnal activities of a Zamindar, he emphasized the need to live according to one's conscience and to evolve a moral code of living based not on fear of God but on conscience. "Ore Eravu" had earlier been staged as a play by K.R. Ramasamy. A.V. Meiyappan (A.V.M) who had met C.N.A. expressed his desire to make it into a film and requested him to write the script suitable for a full length film. C.N.A. came to the AVM Studios on a particular evening and stayed there for a full night and wrote the entire script running to over 300 pages. As per the wishes of C.N.A., P. Neelakandan, a Director, who had then leanings towards Congress and who later directed a number of M.G.R. box office hits, directed the film and the same was released in 1951.

Narana Thirukkannan who reviewed the drama "Ore Eravu" in his "Prasanda Vikatan" in 1946 praised the dramatic effectiveness and the ideals of the play. This drama had exposed in a polished manner the corruptions in society and its superstitions with the intention of freeing
people from the blind and meaningless beliefs. 30

Another popular film for which C.N.A. wrote the story and script was "Sorgavasal" (May 1954). "Sorgavasal" again was an attack on the superstitions of people seeking "Sorgam" (Heaven). Besides, the film sought to depict the grandeur of the Tamil Language and the glory of Tamil Nadu. For the first time the medium of film was used to glorify the Tamil Language. C.N.A.'s personal image rose to great heights after this film was released because on the titles of this film, his name appeared with the prefix "Arignar" (Wiseman) a title which had earlier been conferred on him by Kalki Krishnamurthy. 31 K.R. Ramasamy and S.S. Rajendran took the lead roles in this film. Udumalai Narayansakavi provided songs for the film. Parimalam Pictures produced this film under A. Kannigam's direction. Apart from these


The title "Arignar" was given to C.N.A. by Kalki Krishnamurthy, Editor of "Kalki", for his oratory capacity. When all the other speakers fixed for a particular meeting did not turn up, C.N.A. was the only one who came on time and spoke on all subjects of the speakers without any prior preparation.
films, his voluminous writings in various journals like "Dravidanadu", "Kanchi", "Malaimani", "Home Land" and "Home Rule" and a number of books projected and propagated the DMK ideals. His "Arya Mayai" (Aryan illusion) was a study of the motives and tactics of the Brahmins. His "Kumari-kottam" was a book which advocated eradication of the system of caste. His "Alaiyinar Upathesam" was a critical survey of "Manu". His various other books sought to tackle different social and cultural problems from different angles.

He was also imprisoned for his anti-Brahmin propaganda in "Arya Mayai" and the book also was banned by the Government.

Thanks to the untiring propaganda and reformist zeal of C.N.A., the DMK grew in strength in a phenomenal way, becoming a party with a tremendous mass base. Though his films were only a few number they were intended to propagate the ideals of the Self-Respect Movement and the DMK. His involvement in drama and cinema gave dignity and respect to the artistes who were looked down upon and referred to as "Koothaadigal"\(^ {32}\) (actors on the street)

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His writings and plays inspired many of his followers. C.N.A.'s writings and speeches (C.N.A.'s famous speeches under the title, "Thee Paravattum", "Nadum Edum", etc.) and his dramas and films played a significant role in the growth of his party in strength and stature and its final culmination in his party capturing political power in Tamil Nadu in 1967 and his assuming office as the Chief Minister. Thus his political success owes much to the ideological revolution which he brought about through dramas and films. 33

M. Karunanidhi who is popularly known as "Kalignar" (Artist) by the Tamils for his contribution to the Tamil literature is an orator, editor, novelist, short story writer, poet and pamphleteer, stage actor and script writer for films and plays. He has written stories and scripts for 44 films, 34 150 short stories and hundreds of poems in addition to countless number of journalistic writings. With his powerful pen, he attempted to sweep away the cobwebs of tradition, superstition and priest-craft. In fact, he is a preacher first and an artiste next, for whatever may his medium be, he seems to be speaking from the pulpit. He is a mixture of Savaranola and the Mahatma

34. Thennagath Thalaivan, June 1, 1982.
in his stern crusades against the callous selfishness of the luxurious, and in his fervent mission for the salvation of the poor and the distressed. The uplift of those in misery and wretchedness is the principle theme of all his works. His shafts are aimed against the cruelties inflicted on orphanned humanity by the Knavish, the self-seeking and the greedy. He could have found no more suitable medium for his work than the stage and the screen. 35

Karunanidhi was born in Thirukkuvalai in Tanjore District on June 3, 192236 to orthodox parents, Muthuvelar and Anjugam. He studied upto XI Standard and failed more than twice. He was interested both in acting and politics in his early days. His active participation in politics and acting was the main cause of his failure in the school final examination and his inability to continue his higher studies. Interest in politics was generated in him when he happened to read a book "Panagal Arasar" prescribed as a non-detailed text book for him at the fifth standard. He was so taken up by the book that he memorized the entire 50 pages of the book. As a student of about 16 years of age, when the anti-Hindi agitation was launched

by the DK, he led a procession of his friends after the
classes were over and handed over a pamphlet, condemning the
imposition of Hindi, to his Hindi Pandit himself. He
composed a song which he used to sing in the procession
with his friends: "Vaarungal Ellorum Porukku, Chenriduvom
Vanthirukkum Hidi Peyai Viratti Thiruppiduvom" (meaning,
come let us all join in the war to drive away the Satan,
Hindi). He also ran a hand-written newspaper called "Manava
Nesan" which probably gave him the confidence and training
to start later, "Murasoli" first as a handbill and later on
as a regular newspaper, which is even now a popular daily,
especially among his partymen. His drama "Palaniappan"
(which was also staged as Santha or Nachuppal) was written
and staged for collecting funds for the "Tamil Nadu Manavar"
(Students of Tamil Nadu) in which Rama Arangannal also acted
as a doctor. But since the income from tickets could not
meet even the expenditure incurred for putting up the show
he sold his drama to R.V. Gopal for Rs.100/- who started a
drama troupe called "Nagai Dravida Nadigar Kazhagam". He
himself camped with the drama troupe at places like Villu-
puram and Pondichery and acted as Sivaguru. This provoked
Congressmen to waylay and assault him on the roads of
Pondichery in 1944. E.V.R. who came to know of this
incident took Karunanidhi to Erode and appointed him as a
sub-editor of his journal "Kudiyarasu". His writings tried
to shake the people out of their old habits, dogma, superstition and obsolete moralities so that the flame of life might burn more purely and brightly. His plays with their radical themes and trenchant dialogues profoundly influenced his own partymen and weakened the self-righteous political opponents of his. Arts and drama were to him and still are only the instruments for popularising his party's ideals. As he himself puts it "An art without ideals is like a house without a roof". He also remarked that "an artiste without principles is just a clown".

As a propagandist for the DK, he wrote the play "Thookkumedai" (The scaffold). It was an attempt to further the cause of the DK and to bring down the Congress from the pedestal of power. He himself played the role of "Pandyan", the hero, and his fiery dialogues created a sensation in Tamil Nadu. The Congress Government immediately banned it. Karunanidhi then changed the title of the play to "Vaazha Mudiyathavargal" (those who cannot live). He wrote three plays for the stage, "Ore Muththam" (Only Kiss), "Manthiri Kumari" (Minister's Daughter) and "Parasakthi", all for Devi Nataka Sabha, a well-known dramatic troupe. These plays depicted the sacrifice and suffering of dauntless persons for a noble cause. "Manthiri Kumari" described the conspiracy of a religious head, Raja Guru, a Brahmin priest,
and his son to bring disrepute on the country, while the heroine (Minister's daughter) dies to guard the honour of the land of her birth. To help his party financially, Karunanidhi wrote several plays for the stage such as "Parabrahman", "Udayasooriyan" (the rising sun - which was later adopted as the symbol of the DMK) "Mani Magudam and "Kaagithappoo" (Paper flower). Sivaji Ganesan played the role of the hero in "Parabrahman" and S.S. Rajendran in "Mani Magudam". The plays were popular and the party coffers were overflowing. When "Parasakthi" was released as a film, one of the Congress journals "Thinamani Kathir" criticised the picture. It also carried a cartoon on the cover with the title "Parabrahman" which was the penname of Karunanidhi for the plays in which he himself acted just before the DMK entered into the "Tri-Corner-Agitation" in 1958. [C.N.A. himself appreciated Karunanidhi on his play "Udayasooriyan". It was staged in the Salem and Vellore Conferences, held after the black flag demonstration against Nehru for using the word "nonsense" against Tamils. C.N.A. himself said that the play "Rising Sun" was a turning point in the propagation of the DMK ideas through dramas. It was also said that it was one of the weapons which weakened the Congress Party in the 1962 elections. It also brought a

great deal of money to the party. "Udayasooriyam" was first inaugurated in Devakottai and it was for the first time in the by-election of Devakottai on April 5, 1958 that the symbol of "Rising Sun" was used as the official symbol of the DMK. "Kaagithappoo" in which Karunanidhi himself acted, was a popular political stage-hit and it was the story of a young Congressman who joined the Kazhagam because of his love for the Tamil language. Another social drama of his was "Vellikizhamai" (Friday) which the Shakunthala Troupe played all over Tamil Nadu, drawing large crowds and great appreciation wherever it went. "Manoharan", "Malaikkallan", "Poompuhar" and "Poomalai" were his other contributions to the world of stage drama. All his plays combined humour with seriousness. Karunanidhi's entry into the film world was dramatic.

On seeing his dramas and powerful writings, A.S.A. Samy, a film producer of Coimbatore, invited him to write screen dialogues for "Rajakumari", produced by Jupiter Pictures (Appendix-XVII). So Karunanidhi left Erode and stayed in Coimbatore for this purpose. When the film was released in 1947, to his dismay and shock his name did not find a place in the titles of the film. So Karunanidhi left Coimbatore disappointed. Although the film did not carry much political ideas, his very entry into the film world gave him and his party a fair amount of popularity.
Karunanidhi who left Coimbatore after the release of "Rajakumari" came and settled in his own town Tiruvarur where he wrote "Manthiri Kumari", a theme which he had borrowed from the Tamil epic "Kundalakesi" for Devi Nataka Sabha which was in camp at Tiruvarur then. T.R. Sundaram of Modern Theatres, Salem (which has produced more than 100 films from its inception) produced "Manthiri Kumari" under the direction of Ellis R. Duncan after seeing this film booked Karunanidhi for writing the script for his own film "Manamagal" (Bride). This brought N.S.K and Karunanidhi closer to each other. It was N.S.K. who was mainly responsible for making Karunanidhi settle down in Madras after the latter had finished writing the script for "Manthiri Kumari" at Salem. As the DMK was then supporting the anti-Brahmin Movement, Karunanidhi created the character of a Brahmin priest, Raja Guru, in "Manthiri Kumari", whose son was the leader of some gansters. "Manamagal", which was released in 1952 carried the message of the right of women to seek freedom from the clutches of an unscrupulous husband and to remarry without any social inhibition.

38. Kannadasan, "Vanavasam", Vanathi Pathippagam, Madras, p. 94. T.R. Sundaram, B.A., B.Sc., who was involved in film production from 1933 set up in his "Modern Theatres" in 1937 at Salem. 'Sathi Agalya', was its first film released in March 1937. C.P. Sitrarasu and Asaithambi also came to the story department of Modern Theatres to write script for films when M. Karunanidhi joined the Modern Theatres for writing script for "Manthiri Kumari".
In "Parasakthi" (1952) which is considered as the milestone in the history of social movies in Tamil Cinema, the leading character tried to ridicule the concept of God as outdated and even as irrelevant in the growth of human society as such. A careful reading of the dialogues written by Karunanidhi would reveal his outright condemnation of the Brahmin community who alone could become the priests in the Hindu temples. In a piece of dialogue, he has said that in a democratic set up, even a beggar could become a Minister. What he wanted to communicate was the idea that domination by the rich urban rulers was not really conducive to the realization of the basic needs of the rural population in Tamil Nadu. The glorification of Tamil Nadu as the motherland was explicitly done in this picture in order to drive home forcibly the basic policy of the DMK at the time of its inception to fight for a separate "Dravida Naadu". "Parasakthi" was able to effect an impact on the different sections of the Hindu society carrying out to them the political and social ideas of the DMK. It was essentially responsible for the building up of the mass base of the DMK in Tamil Nadu and this fact was not realized for long by the Congress Party. In the film "Ammaiyappan" (1954), Karunanidhi openly criticised religion and religious practices. It explicitly propagated Self-Respect ideas and separatist ideas of the DMK. The dialogues and the songs of the film also carried the DMK message.
Karunanidhi is first and foremost a journalist more than anything else and he is very good at that. When he was the Chief Minister, he once remarked, "I am first a Kalaignar (artiste) and then only a Minister". He has always sought to serve the party, whatever be the position he held. His writings were biased, oriented towards the rights of the downtrodden. The pen served as a sword to the DMK. But the oratory of the star speakers of the party also effectively helped the party in the capture of political power. And Karunanidhi's contribution in this sphere was by no means mean. He was a powerful orator, who with his alliterative rhetoric resonant voice, cold logic, apt parables and revealing similies, captured the imagination of the masses.

Besides C.N.A. and Karunanidhi there were other script and story writers like Bharathidasan, A.V.P. Asaithambi, Rama Arangannal, Kannadasan and Murasoli Maran who contributed their own share to the growth of the party. Bharathidasan, the poet revolutionary, has written story and script for a few films. When the DMK was formed he was one of the important personalities to leave the DK along with C.N.A. Bharathidasan was primarily a gifted poet and his poems mainly glorified the Tamil cult. He also wrote powerful and moving lyrics on social themes. His own film "Valayapathi" carried some of his revolutionary ideas.
A.V.P. Asaithambi a leading figure in the DMK Party was a script writer and editor of the daily "Thani Arasu" (Separate State). He wrote the script for one of the important DMK propaganda films "Sarvathikari" in which M.G.R acted as the hero. Ministers were one of the targets of attack in this film. One of the songs in this film directly attacked the Ministers,

Ulagil makkalukke Aatchinnu Solluvaanga
Inge Manthirikke Makkalunnu Aachuthe

meaning that people may say that the Government is for people but here the people are for Ministers (who in their political capacity act as dictators).

Besides, C.N.A., M. Karunanidhi, Bharathi-dasan and A.V.P. Asaithambi there were a number of other prominent DMK men who had strong holds in the film world as script writers, such as K.C. Krishnamurthy (Anthaman Kathali) and Kannadasan (Thirudathe, Mannaathi Mannan, Malaiyitta Mangai, Sivagangai Seema, and a few other films). Rama Arangannal, R.M. Veerappan, Kovai Chezhian and some of the notable film producers were deeply committed to DMK. For example, Kovai Chezhian was an MLA and the Vice-Chairman of the Tamil Nadu Planning Commission, Rama Arangannal was the Chairman of the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board and R.M. Veerappan is now a Minister in the M.G.R. Cabinet. Rama Arangannal was also the editor of "Dravida Naadu" when
C.N.A. was puts publisher. Rama Arangannal wrote the script for C.N.A.'s "Thai Magalukku Kattiya Thaali". He also wrote the script for "Pon Vilaiyum Boomi". Murasoli Maran, editor of a daily "Murasoli" wrote the script of "Vanangamudi".

The film "Parasakthi" apart from treating the chastity of a woman as the noblest of virtues emphasized the need to encourage far reaching social reforms such as widow remarriage and active participation of women in all spheres of human endeavour. The attack on the Hindu religion was a consequence of the conviction that the codes of the Hindu religion cared only for the welfare of the Brahmin community at the cruel expense of other communities in Tamil Nadu. The main cause of the Brahmin domination was considered to be the Sanskrit influence from the north. This forced the leaders of the DMK to glorify Tamil language and culture and to call for an immediate revival of the Tamil society and its ancient glory built upon and inspired by the indigenous Tamil wisdom, manners and social habits. The attack on the caste system was mainly aimed at the Brahmin community. It was strongly believed that the removal of Brahmins from position of power, prestige and influences would enable other castes of Tamil society blossom into a full status without any inhibition. The leaders of the DMK sought to communicate through Tamil films a new system of morality evolving out of common sense and rationalism in
consonance with some of the outstanding Tamil works on ethics of human behaviour like "Thirukkural". Karunanidhi offered one of the touching and appealing interpretations of "Thirukkural" which is held as the Bible of the modern Tamil society. His interpretation to every Kural is unique and written in a dramatic style.

The film stories presented by the DMK writers were heavily loaded with incidents depicting the poverty of the common man, the arrogant tone of the affluent and the total indifference of the privileged to care for the welfare and the social uplift of the downtrodden in the Tamil society. Most of the films condemned the Congress Party and its national outlook which sought to ignore regional interests. However, enough care was taken in the criticism to be suggestive, leaving the obvious identification of the object of criticism in their films to the politically conscious audience.

The entry of Kannadasan, a lyric poet of versatile talents and remarkable felicity into the film world marked the beginning of an era in the Tamil film in which the songs constituted an important ingredient. Kannadasan who adorned the Tamil film world for more than 30 years played his role in more than one capacity. Like most men in the film world, he did not have a brilliant academic career;
he had studied only up to the VII standard when he left his home to seek entry into the films as a song writer. His first song was for the film "Kanniyin Kaathali". He had written more than 5000 songs\textsuperscript{39} for various films during his 30 years inseparable association with the film world. Besides songs, he had also provided stories and scripts for a number of films most of which he himself produced. The first film for which he wrote the script was "Illara Jothi". Then he had not established himself as a political personality. His involvement in politics is an interesting episode. N.S.Krishnan who was already an established film artiste was Kannadasan's hero and it was N.S.K who got for Kannadasan a place of prominence and stability in the film world as a lyric poet as well as a script writer. N.S.K. was particular that Kannadasan should write songs for his films. In fact, N.S.K. insisted with Lena Chettiar, the producer of "Raja Desingu" that Kannadasan should write the scripts for "Raja Desingu". Kannadasan broke into politics because of his association with M. Karunanidhi while both of them were together for a film produced by Modern Theatres, Salem. This informal friendship later developed into personal friendship and resulted in the active involvement of Kannadasan in the active politics of the DMK.\textsuperscript{39} Besides providing songs for a

\textsuperscript{39} Cinema Express, January 1, 1981.
number of films, he also wrote the scripts for a number of films like "Madurai Veeran", "Mannaathi Mannan", "Naadodi Mannan", "Mahaa Devi", "Raja Desingu" all of which were M.G.R. box office hits.

By now Kannadasan was much identified as one of the leading DMK personalities. To this he owes a great deal to M. Karunanidhi with whom he has undertaken a number of political tours all over Tamil Nadu. A Public meeting addressed by M. Karunanidhi and Kannadasan was a common sight of the 1950s so much so that both had become very personal friends. Kannadasan was so actively involved in the party affairs of the DMK, that he took part in most of the agitations of the DMK party and courted arrest and imprisonment. 40 Kannadasan also was active in the electoral participation of the DMK. He was the DMK Party candidate in the 1957 elections to the State Legislative Assembly from the Thirukazhiyur 41 Constituency. He lost this election apart from incurring a heavy financial loss. In order to make up his financial losses in the elections he produced the film "Malaiyitta Mangai" for which he provided the story, script and the songs. This film though not a very


successful one from the commercial point of view, was a magnificent success from the political point of view for it brought to him and to the DMK Party widespread popularity because of one of his songs in the film, which begins as follows "Engal Dravida Ponnaadc, Kalai Vaazhum Thennaade" (Our golden land of Dravidians, the southern land in which arts flourish). One of the films he himself wrote and produced was "Sivagangai Seema", a historical which portrayed the Marutha Pandiyans, even before the Katta Bomman, as the first to oppose the British. Even such a historical film was used by Kannadasan to give publicity to the then DMK journals through a song:

Mantram malarum Murasoli Ketkum
Vaazhnthidum Nam Nadu - elanth
Thentral thavazhum theenthamizh pesum
Dravidadath Thirunaadu (Dravida Nadu)

(The underlined words are the names of the DMK Journals).

Kannadasan had had a chequered political career, having moved from one party to another. He parted company with C.N.A. and M. Karunanidhi and founded the Tamil Desiya Katchi (Tamil National Party) along with E.V.K.Sampath one of the founders of the DMK. The reason that Kannadasan himself gave for leaving the DMK on April 9, 1961 was that he was disappointed the way C.N.A. had treated him in the party. According to him while he and D.V. Narayanaswamy worked for the DMK Party's first ever success in the Madras
 Corporation Elections in 1959, C.N.A. had attributed the victory to Karunanidhi's hardwork and honoured him with the gift of a golden ring. Slowly difference of opinion between Kannadasan and the other DMK leaders like C.N.A. and M. Karunanidhi was brewing. It was then that Kannadasan who had not so far penned songs for Sivaji Ganesan movies on a large scale wrote songs for two of Sivaji Ganesan hits, "Bhagappirivinai" and "Padikkaatha Methai". On account of this he received a number of letters of condemnation from the DMK. When in 1961 E.V.K. Sampath broke away from the DMK to found the Tamil National Party (TNP), he found in Kannadasan an active supporter. It was then that a strong rumour that both E.V.R. and Kamaraj had engineered this split in the DMK was afloat. It may be recalled that Kannadasan referred to Kamaraj as "Padikkaatha Methai" (Unlettered genius). Later, Kannadasan even went to the extent of attacking C.N.A. in some of the film songs he wrote. To cite an example, in the film "Padithaalmattum Pothumaa", in a song beginning "Komali! Komali! Komali! (Clown! Clown! Clown!) he indirectly referred to C.N.A. as a clown in the following line. "Arivatra Koottam Aruginil Eruthaal Arignanum Komali" (C.N.A. referred to as Arignar, was a Komali because he was allegedly surrounded by fools).

His association with the Tamil National Party was short-lived, for, soon after the birth of the
party, E.V.K. Sampath decided to merge it with the Congress Party. Later, when the Congress Party itself suffered a split, Kannadasan identified himself with Kamaraj in the Congress Organisation. Later, after Kamaraj's death when the Congress (O) merged with the Congress Party led by Mrs. Gandhi, he along with the leading members of the Congress (O) such as Karuppiiah Mooppanaar and Sivaji Ganesan joined Mrs. Gandhi's Party. It was at this stage that M.G.R.'s AIADMK Party captured power in Tamil Nadu. Seizing the opportunity, Kannadasan lost no time in extending his support to M.G.R. and his government for which gesture M.G.R. honoured him by appointing him as the Poet Laureate of the Tamil Nadu Government.

The multi-faceted career of this lyric poet, story and script wright, actor, producer, orator, journalist and politician came to an end when he died a premature death in 1981 in the USA where he had gone to address the Tamil Association.

The times of Kannadasan mark an important phase in the history of the Tamil film world when film songs were effectively used for propagating political and social ideas. There can be no denial of the substantial contribution of Kannadasan to the growth and popularity of the DMK through his film songs.
Apart from Kannadasan, there were a number of song writers, who with their own style of songs, created a kind of sensation in the film world. Those who deserve mention are, Udumalai Narayankavi and Pattukkottai Kalyanasundaram who had Marxist leanings. The DMK used their songs to propagate socialist ideas and the dignity of labour for the upliftment of the working class. When Kannadasan left the DMK in 1961 he was gradually prevented from writing songs for the films in which M.G.R. acted. His place was given to Vaali, a newcomer, and who, besides justifying the choice more than adequately fitted in the role that was expected of him by M.G.R.

If the role of writers in using films as a handy means of communication was significant, no less significant was the role played by actors in driving home the ideologies of the political parties they belonged to.

One of the actors who had come along with C.N.A. when he founded his DMK was K.R. Ramaswamy. He had staged C.N.A.'s popular plays like "Velaikkari", "Ore Eravu" and "Sorgavasal". He also played lead roles when these dramas were made into films. Besides, he was an active partyman having participated in the DMK agitations. For example, during the anti-Hindi agitation, he erased with tar the Hindi letters on the sign boards at the Coimbatore
Railway Station. He also used to address public meetings organised by the DMK and to accompany C.N.A. on his tours. He was considered as the Garrick of C.N.A.

Another actor whom C.N.A. loved dearly for his refined and thoughtful humour was "Kalaivanar" (Master of Arts) N.S. Krishnan. K.R. Ramaswamy and N.S. Krishnan were the best of his friends to the last. N.S. Krishnan was not merely an actor but a producer as well. He started a film company at Coimbatore in 1939 called "Ashoka Films" under whose banner he produced "Puththimani Balavan Avan", "Naveena Vikramathithan", "Chandra Hari", "Eshandha Kathal". His other company, the NSK-Films, produced "Nalla Thambi".

He also had his own dramatic troupe called NSK Nataka Sabha. "Sri Krishna Leela", "Naam Iruvar", "Paithiyakkarvan", "Irupathum Aruppathum" and "Nalla Thambi" were some of the plays staged by his drama company. He was a good singer himself and a "Villuppattu" performer. His "Gandhi Mahaan Sarithiram" was an outstanding piece of "Villuppattu" while "Kinthanan Sarithiram" was the best of his Kalatchebams.


43. N.S.K. was born on November 29, 1908 in Ozhugincheri to Sudalaiyandi and Esakki. He joined the TKS Brothers Drama Company, "Sir Bala Shanmuganantha Sabha" in 1925. His first film was Sathi Leelavathi.
(N.S.K. may be considered as a pioneer in exploiting films for political advantage.) In his roles he always tried to project realistically the social evils of the Hindu society, which he believed to be the consequence of the age-long Brahmin domination. His "Nalla Thambi" portrayed Kinthanar as a character with Self-Respect. His "Paithiyakkaran" supported widow remarriages. His "Panam" propagated the ideals of the DMK Party indirectly. Those were the days when N.S.K. was so much in demand that people wanted him to appear in some role or the other in Tamil films. Whether he played a small role or big role he preached nationalistic and revolutionary ideas through his role of a comedian in the company of his wife T.A. Mathuram.

N.S.K. was highly connected with most of the political leaders, but his association with the leaders of the DMK was more intimate. He was a good friend of P. Jeevanandam, a leader of the Communist Party, whom he had kept in his house in disguise as a "Pandaram" 44 (sage) when the latter was wanted by the police. N.S.K. was very close to Karunanidhi with whom he had worked in a number of films.

He lived as a philanthropist, who gave up most of his wealth for the needy and died in poverty on August 10, 1957.

44. Karunanidhi, M. "Nenjukku Needhi", op.cit., p. 147.
Sivaji Ganesan who entered the film world through "Parasakthi" and who has been dominating the film world over three decades, was a member of the DMK to start with. "Parasakthi" advocated the political ideas of the DMK and was also a powerful plea for the formation of Dravida Nadu as a separate nation.

"Manoharaa" was another film featuring Sivaji Ganesan. The powerful dialogues of his film were written by M. Karunanidhi. He personified Tamil Nadu as the mother of Tamil society which had been politically and socially suppressed by an alien North Indian political and social tradition. The ardent desire of the DMK to form a separate Dravida Nadu was emphasized in this film and it was hoped to achieve it through the power of speech and intellect and not by the power of sword.

Sivaji Ganesan's tenure with the DMK was short and he quit the DMK in the year 1957. The reason for his leaving the DMK may be said to be his strong religious sentiments which were resented by the DMK. For example, after the success in the early stages of his career when Sivaji Ganesan had been to Tirupathi to offer the hair on his head as an offering to Lord Venkatachalapathy, he received widespread condemnation from the rank and file of the party. Secondly, he viewed his staying in the DMK and
subserving its ideals through films as a potential danger to the fulfilment of his ambitions as a multi-faceted actor. While it should be said that it was his association with the DMK which got him the successful entry into the films his contribution to the party was practically nothing.

Of the actors who have made substantial contribution to the popular growth of the DMK, S.S. Rajendran (S.S.R), who is referred to as "Ilatchiya Nadigar" (Actor for Principles), stands out. He joined a drama troupe, P.K. Subba Reddiyars Puliyamanager Boys Company at the age of seven. His first role was in Veera Abhimanyu.

In 1940 he joined the T.K.S. Brother's Madurai Sri Bala Shanmugananda Sabha. N.S. Narayanan who was one of the actors in T.K.S. Balashanmuga Sabha was mainly responsible for S.S.R.'s involvement in politics and social reform movement. Another popular actor of those times, "Nadigamani" D.V. Narayanaswamy, was one of the activists of the DMK. Narayanaswamy was active in spreading the rationalistic and Self-Respect ideas from the stage and public platforms. Narayanaswamy who was the friend (later on became the brother-in-law) of S.S.R. also was responsible for S.S.R.'s involvement in politics.

T.K.S.'s Company which was touring all over Tamil Nadu once camped at Erode, where S.S.R. came into
contact with E.V.R. and C.N.A. whose influence later led him to join the Dravidian Movement. As he was much influenced by the rationalistic ideas of E.V.R. and C.N.A., he left T.K.S.'s company in 1943, because he had no belief in mythological stories and also wanted to introduce new themes in his dramas. In a Television Programme, "Malarum Ninaivugal" (Reminiscences) recently telecast by Madras Television Centre (1983), he pointed out that he had rejected even the offers which came to him from A.P. Nagarajan and other producers and directors to act in mythological films. He had rejected the offers because, as a member of the Self-Respect Movement and as a rationalist he had no belief in the Hindu mythological stories.

After leaving T.K.S.'s Company, he acted in a number of drama troupes like Mohana Gana Sabha, Madras, Iyappan Natasabhai, Coimbatore and Bharathi Nataka Manram.

S.S.R. and D.V. Narayanaswamy joined K.R. Ramasamy's (K.R.R.) drama company, Krishnan Nataka Sabha, as C.N.A. had asked them to do so. As a member of the Self-Respect Movement he got married to Pankajam on December 1, 1946 in the presence of Revolutionary poet, Bharathi Dasan and C.N. Annadurai, according to Self-Respect fashion. S.S.R. was fond of C.N.A. and has acted in C.N.A.'s dramas, "Ore Eravu", "Chandramohan", "Neethidevan
Mayakkam" and "Velaikkari". When he started his own film Company, S.S.R. Pictures, he showed in the film the emblem bearing the DMK flag. The first film of SSR Pictures directed by S.S.R. was "Thangarathinam" which showed C.N.A. addressing a party conference. He also acted and directed films like "Muthu Mandapam", "Alli" and "Mani Magudam". He was awarded the President's shield for "Kumudam", "Sarada" and "Kaikodutha Deivam". His first film was "Parasakthi" and he has acted in about 70 films (Appendix-XVIII), the last being "Erattai Manithan" (1982). His popular films were "Kalai Deivam", "Muthalaali" and "Thai Piranthaal Vazhi Pirakkum".

Apart from his film company, the SSR Pictures, he had his own drama company and staged M. Karunanidhi's plays like "Ammaiyappan" and "Mani Magudam". S.S.R. staged "Mani Magudam" for thirteen continuous years in the nook and corners of Tamil Nadu, spreading rationalistic ideas.

After K.R.R. and N.S.K., it was S.S.R. who was the most active and prominent actor in the DMK, inspite of M.G.R.'s presence in the party.

Perhaps S.S.R. may be the first film artiste to contest an election in Tamil Nadu. For the first time, he contested in 1957 from the Theni Constituency to the Madras Legislative Assembly, but was defeated by
N.R. Thiagarajan. Again he contested from the same constituency, Theni in 1962 and defeated the same N.R. Thiagarajan and became a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly. In 1969, he was made a member of the Parliament (MP), of the Rajya Sabha, and his membership lasted till 1975.

When the split came in the DMK in 1972, he stood with Karunanidhi, but due to personal and political reasons, he parted company with Karunanidhi and joined the AIADMK in 1976. He was appointed the Vice-Chairman of the Tamil Nadu Small Savings Advisory Board in 1980, which post he still holds. When the Tamil Nadu Assembly was dissolved in 1980 and Mid-Term Polls were held, he contested from the Andipatti constituency and won with the biggest margin of 27,981 votes (S.S.R. polled 44,490 votes against his immediate Congress-I candidate Kandasamy*, who polled 16,508 votes). Though S.S.R. had been regarded as a good actor, his deep involvement in politics made him lose his chance in the film world which is highly competitive. Unlike M.G.R. he has courted arrest and been imprisoned for political reasons. However, his political success was not significant compared with that of M.G.R. It may be due to his failure to build up a good political and personal image.

* It is to be noted that the same Kandasamy contested in 1977 as a AIADMK candidate and won the election securing 24,311 votes against Gurusamy (Janata) who secured 16,269 votes.
Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandram whom people affectionately call, variedly as M.G.R., "Makkal Thilagam", "Ponmanachemmal", "Puratchinadigar", "Vaathiyaar", "Puratchi Thalaivar" is perhaps the only actor of great stature in Tamil films committed to political propaganda through films. In no other part of the world has a film actor, created a sensation in the politics of a State and commanded such a mass following as this matinee idol has done in 1972. It is doubtful if either Gandhiji or Nehru attracted such huge crowds as M.G.R. does today. 45 To his followers he is an embodiment of charity, valour and moral rectitude.

M.G.R. was born as the fifth child of a Malayalee parents in Kandy, Sri Lanka on January 17, 1917. 46 He lost his father Gopala Menon, Principal of a College (who served as Magistrate in India before he left for Sri Lanka) when he was three years old and so the family migrated to Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu, where the family had to go through great sufferings during his early years. In the process, the family lost two sisters and one brother. Prompted by economic consideration, M.G.R. joined a dramatic troupe, the Madurai Original Boys Company at the age of


seven, where he had the "Gurukula Vaasam" (Living with the drama company). In the beginning he was paid four annas (25 paise per week). M.G.R. and the other boys in his group were mainly trained by Kali N. Ratnam, a leading actor of that time. (M.G.R. regards Kali N. Ratnam as his Guru).

After sometime, M.G.R.'s salary was fixed at the 'princely' sum of Rs. 5/- a month to be sent to his mother Sathyabhama. He had learned dancing and sword fighting in the Boys Company which experience later served him well in his film career. In the Boys Company, he would not know which role he had to play. So he used to memorise the scripts for all the characters of all dramas so that he could play any role assigned to him.

M.G.R. entered the cine field at the age of 19. His first film was "Sathi Leelavathi" (1936) in which he acted only in a minor role, as a Sub-Inspector of Police (Appendix-XIX). Till he appeared as a hero in


50. Film Fare, November 8, 1968, pp. 25-27.
"Rajakumari" (1947) (script by M. Karunanidhi) he had acted only in minor roles. His last film, "Maduraiyai Meetta Sundarapandian", was released in 1978 when he was 61. In all, M.G.R. has acted in 136 films. He was in the film world for 42 years, which is the longest period for any actor in the Tamil film world. From 1947 to 1978 he has acted in 117 films as hero.\textsuperscript{51}

M.G.R. was a four-anna member (Party membership fee 25 paise) of the Indian National Congress but he left the Congress when he felt it was not right for Gandhiji to have opposed the democratic election of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose as the President of the Congress Party.\textsuperscript{52} He also could not understand the usefulness of Gandhiji's insistence on village reconstruction.

In search of a political guru (leader) whom he could follow, M.G.R. chose, C.N.A. inspite of his earlier leans towards R.M. Lohia and Ashoka Metha, after his break with the Congress.

M.G.R. strongly believed that his roles in films must show how a man should live and believe.\textsuperscript{53} His

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Friends}, op.cit., p. 19.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 19.

development as a film hero was put into shape with the help of scripts written by his erstwhile colleague M. Karunanidhi and his political guru C.N.A. 54 "Rajakumari" was a story of kings and queens with a lot of fighting scenes and the script for this film was written by Karunanidhi. Jupiter Pictures paid him Rs.2500/- for the film and the film itself was a moderate success. However, with "Rajakumari", M.G.R.'s luck began to turn. His steady identification with the DMK and its ideals, along with the influence of C.N.A. found its culmination in his playing the role of a hero in the film "Malaikallan" (produced by Patchi Raja in 1954) the first Tamil film that received the President's Silver Medal for the best regional picture. 55 The script for "Malaikallan" was written by M. Karunanidhi. Though Patchi Raja wanted the script to be written without any political tinge 56 Karunanidhi wrote the script in such a way that it indirectly carried the social and political message of the DMK to the masses. The enormous success of the film gave a boost not only to the DMK but to M.G.R. also. The initial attempt of the film was to impress upon the need to fight

54. C.N.A. has written script for only one film, "Nallavan Vaazhvaan," for M.G.R.


against the prevailing political and social disorder by all means without any inhibition. The film praised the glory of the Tamils and their magnanimity towards foreigners. The first song "Thamizhan Entroru Inamundu, Thaniye Adarkoru Gunamundu" speaks of the glory of the Tamil language, and culture. Another philosophical song "Yethanai Kaalamthaan Yemaatruvaar Inda Naattile, nam Naattile" gave a warning to the black marketeers and other exploiters of society. The song also goes on to say that schools should be started everywhere and illiteracy poverty and hunger should be wiped out. M.G.R. made it a point to have in each of the films he acted atleast one song carrying the socialist ideology of the DMK. Of the several films featuring M.G.R. as the hero, "Malaikkallan" was the most successful film. The major attraction of this film was that the hero being a young outlaw, was determined to defeat the plots of the greedy and lustful men and get rid of them and their illgotten wealth. The role of M.G.R. in films has a marked resemblance to Robin Hood, the folk-hero in English Ballads. M.G.R. sees himself as the protector of the common man and is convinced of the moral purpose of his films. M.G.R. film is a 'morality play' in which good inevitably triumphs over evil. The hero (M.G.R.) is all virtuous, he may be the captain of the guard in revolt against the tyrannies of a wicked divan, a humble clerk at odds with a corrupt
bureaucracy, a peasant who struggles against the cruel landlord and so on. The hero M.G.R. neither smokes nor drinks and is devoted to his suffering mother. P. Neelakandan, a Congressman and a director who has directed more than 15 films of M.G.R. in a T.V. interview has said that he was so absorbed in the acting of M.G.R. in the film, "Thirudaathe" in which he laments over the death of his mother that he forgot to say "Cut" when the scene was over. In love scenes M.G.R., the hero, was almost invariably the pursued rather than the pursuer.

Though the film producers and script writers and song writers and other co-actors belonged to different political leanings and beliefs, M.G.R. was so successful in bringing them to his fold and making them agree to make films which projected his image and that of the party. A tone of sublimity and nobility was given to the DMK propaganda machinery by M.G.R. through his powerful portrayal of characters and he succeeded in selling the ideals of the DMK in a number of films.

DMK slowly began to introduce in the films the symbols and party colours. For example in "Naadodi Mannan" (produced by M.G.R. himself) for the first time when the emblem of M.G.R. Pictures with the DMK flag in Red and Black was shown there was a big uproar in the
theatres. And one could see how the audience waited impatiently for M.G.R. to make his appearance in the film, and when he did, it was usually followed by a lot of emotion and commotion, cheer and whistling. To M.G.R. goes the credit of showing DMK flag first on the Tamil screen. Later on, the motive of the "rising sun" serving as the party emblem, was often suggestively used in films. The word "Anna" referring to C.N.A., was also used in films, very frequently in dialogues and songs. In "Anbe Vaa" (1966) the rising sun was shown in colour and M.G.R. himself appeared in black and red dress (DMK flag has black and red). In "Chakravarthi Thirumagal" (1957) the name of the character played by M.G.R. was Udayasooriyen (rising sun). Art and politics are the two sides of the coin says M.G.R. 57 This politicization of the audio-visual medium of the film resulted in a series of films featuring M.G.R. wherein invariably the hero was characterised as an invincible champion of Dravidian culture so fighting against the Sanskritic leadership of the North bravely and successfully. For example, "Manthiri Kumari" (1951) (script by Karunanidhi and direction by T.R. Sundaram and Ellis Duncan), Raja Guru, the Brahmin priest and villain of the film was finally

overthrown by M.G.R. who acted as Veera Moha, the hero. Raja Guru was portrayed as the cause for all the problems in the country and his son was portrayed as the leader of the gangsters.

Though M.G.R. was projecting social and political themes through other films made by others, he was not fully satisfied with his restricted roles. Therefore, in order to project a full-fledged image of himself, he produced the film "Naadodi Mannan" to drive home the social and political ideas of his party.58 "Naadodi Mannan", released on August 22, 1958, was a box office hit. Besides producing it and acting in it, M.G.R. provided the story for the film and also for the first time directed a film. This film effectively conveyed the DMK ideology. The title song of this film, Senthamizhe Vanakkam - Aadi Dravidar Vaazhvina Seerodu Vilakkunee was in praise of the Tamil language. Another song which welcomed the hero of the film (M.G.R.) was in praise of Tamil Nadu and its leaders and there was a reference to the rising sun. In another song, "Thanthu Thanthu Karam Sivanthanave", M.G.R.'s philanthropic nature was praised. M.G.R. also used his dialogue to show his faith in non-violence and his great concern for the poor. One of the

dialogues, for example, goes thus: "Only in peaceful revolution we can attain success". In another dialogue, he expresses his concern for the poor and attacks the rich: "No wonder you (rich) cannot understand the problems of the people, who live in slums, because you have seen only vessels full of milk. How can you understand the problems of a poor man who is longing at least for one piece of cloth to cover his "Maanam" (nakedness) when your problem is that of choosing one from among 2000 clothes". Through the various characters of that film he communicated the political ideas of DMK. When the film was released, there were long queues to get admission tickets in front of the theatres and the film is very popular even today. "Thinamalar" a Tamil daily praised the movie as a "Himalayan Victory". "Ananda Vikatan" remarked "If you see it once you would like to see it again", "Hindu" commented "M.G.R. has done a worthwhile job".

Those days it was believed that M.G.R. could shine only in historical movies and that he was not fit for socials. But he belied all such opinion about his capabilities by acting\(^{59}\) in a film

"Thirudaathe"\(^{60}\) which was a social movie. It was a terrific success. This was the first of M.G.R.'s film with a social theme. Much doubt prevailed initially about the success of the film, but it proved to be a box-office hit and since then M.G.R. has never looked back. On the heels of "Thirudaathe" came a whole line of hit films "Thaai Sollai Thattaathe" by 'Sando' Chinnappa Thevar, "Kaavalkaran" by R.M. Veerappan, who is now a Minister in M.G.R.'s cabinet, "Engaveettu Pillai", "Olivilakku", "Adimai Pennn", "Rickshawkkaran", and so on. M.G.R.'s involvement with the DMK became deeper as his film career progressed. His growing popularity with the masses made him a valuable asset to the DMK.

The significance of the inter-caste marriage was well-brought out in a film "Kudumbath Thalaivan". The film was also noted for its powerful propagation of the DMK ideology. "Enga Veettu Pillai" was a romantic-musical-comedy essentially geared to defend the ideals of DMK as an imperative

60. Chinna Annamalai, (Savithri Pictures), a Congressman and a strong propagandist against DMK met M.G.R. and expressed that he wanted to book M.G.R. for his social movie based on 'pocketmar' a Hindi film. M.G.R. suggested that the film should be a moral one teaching good things to the people and so he suggested that he would give Rs.500/- if some one suggest best title for the movie. One M. Lakshmanan suggested "Thirudaathe" (Don't steal) and got Rs.500/- from M.G.R.
to the social and economic upliftment of the poorer masses of Tamil Nadu. Almost all the movies of M.G.R. gave the viewers the impression that the roles portrayed by the actor (M.G.R.) reflected his actions and attitudes in real life. To an M.G.R. fan, the man (M.G.R.) was nothing short of the projection of his screen image. In "Enga Veettu Pillai" he gives hopes to the poor in a song, "If my orders are executed, the poor will never suffer; first came Christ, then came Gandhiji for the people. But people have neither repented nor corrected their ways and also forgot what they said... but time will come when... I will set things right". In "Petraalthaan Pillaiyaa", M.G.R. argued for the uplift of the poor in Tamil Nadu and also stressed the point that to be a leader of the masses one should possess a high sense of duty, self-control and honesty. It argued that the guilty must be corrected and stressed the need for the rehabilitation of the poor and for rendering social justice to them.

"Nam Naadu" was one of the many popular films of M.G.R. which exposed the exploitation of the masses by the unscrupulous section of a society and the ultimate success over them by the determined will of the public. The following song from the film described C.N.A. as the Gandhi of the South and also carried a reference to
M.G. Ramachandran in one of his super hit films 'Yenga Veettuppillai' singing 'Nan aniycittal athu nadanthu vittal Intha yezhaigal vethani padamattar'.

Courtesy: Stills Nagaraja Rao.
the rising sun.

Jananaayagathil Naam Yellorum Mannar
Thennaattu Gandhi Annaalil Sonnaar

Sooriyam Uthichathunga enga
Kaarirul Marainjuthunga

In another song, "Annavin Thambi Unmaiyin Thozhan, Yezhaiyin Thalaivan Neengalaiya", M.G.R. was referred to as Anna's (C.N.A.'s) younger brother, friend of the truth and leader of the poor. Anna's famous phrase which explained the ideals of the DMK as Duty, Discipline and Dignity also found expression in one of the songs as

Kadamai Kanniyam Kattuppaadu
(Duty, Dignity and Discipline)
Kalathinele Azhiyaathu

The film also stressed the duty of the youth to help the aged and strive for the emancipation of women in the society. M.G.R.'s films also portrayed the vast economic and social gap between the rich and poor in the Tamil society and also exposed the political corruption in Tamil Nadu. In 'Engal Thangam", story and script by Murasoli Maran, nephew of M. Karunanidhi, there was a sustained attempt towards praising C.N.A. as the God Father of Tamil Nadu and it argued that 'Anna's (C.N.A.'s) Raj was for the poor where there were no gheros and ordinances restricting people's freedom. One of the songs in that film described Anna as a legendary figure, as C.N.A. was no more when the film was released.
C.N.A. taught the Tamils to face any burden with robust heart (Ethaiyum Thangum Ithayam) and had exhorted every Tamilian to stand by the glory of the Tamil language. A song in the film referred to M.G.R.'s escaping death from a shooting incident and the attempt on his life on the eve of 1967 elections, "I died and came back alive. I laughed at Yama" (Yaman, the God of death). He meant that he was saved from death to be able to save the people.

A few of M.G.R.'s films stressed the duties of an honest government servant. In "Thaai Sollai Thattaathe" M.G.R. portrayed the sense of devotion and responsibility of a police detective. In "En Kadamai", M.G.R. acted as a conscientious Police Inspector. These films conveyed the message that to be good one might appear bad to others, but on that account one could not forsake the sense of duty. In "Kannith Thaei" and "Aasai Mugam", the songs conveyed the idea that distribution of wealth and class conflict must ultimately benefit the poor.

Along with the film image, M.G.R. has had the advantage of projecting himself in the image of a political leader. His real image and film image were almost identical. People did not accept him as a mere actor. That is the distinctive feature of M.G.R.
Of the films that stressed the dignity of labour, M.G.R.'s Rickshawkaran" in which he played the role of a rickshaw puller, stands supreme. This earned him the "Bharath" award, the highest to be given to any film actor in India. M. Karunanidhi the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu praised him to skies. It is worth-mentioning that, in this film M.G.R. acted as a graduate, who willingly took up the profession of a rickshaw puller and thereby stressed the dignity of labour. The main theme of this film is that intelligence combined with physical labour will make a man honourable and respectable. This film is one of the box office hits breaking many previous records.

Songs and dialogues have been fully exploited in Tamil films featuring M.G.R., to project the ideals of DMK. Such films have sought to stress repeatedly the glory of the Tamil language and the need for absolute faith in "Anna" (C.N.Annadurai). "Kaanchi Thalaivan", "Naadodi Mannan", "Adimai Penn", "Mannaathi Mannan", "Arasa Kattalai", "Vikramathithan", "Marutha Naattu Ilavarasi" and "Arasilinekumari" are some of the legendary films in which M.G.R. has acted. In "Mannathi Mannan", (script by Kannadasan) a tribe described as a fearless protector of Dravida Nadu was portrayed. M.G.R. has always appeared as a youthful and virtuous hero doing kind acts like rescuing a damsel who is in distress or saving a commoner from the
clutches of a despot. In these films good has always triumphed over evil and the distinction between good and evil was always based on the philosophy of the DMK. There were films in which M.G.R. has successfully built up the image of being the protector of the common man. This image helped him immensely as a political asset especially after his parting from the DMK in 1972.

The titles of his films themselves speak of the intention of M.G.R. He has been particular that his movies must show how a man should live and believe in things that are good. His films also represented the various social strata in the society. He has acted in several roles, from that of a scavenger to that of a king, thus covering almost all possible roles one can think of. His films have always borne very catchy and moral titles, for example "Thirudaathe" (Don't steal), "Nallavan Vaazhvaan" (The good will prosper), "Meenava Nanban" (Friend of the fisherman), "Thaai Sollai Thattaathe" (Do not violate the words of mother), "Neethikkuppin Paasam" (Passion after Justice), "Annamitta Kai" (The hand that gave food) "Nam Naadu!" (Our Land), "Enn Annan" (My Brother), "Neethikku Thalaivanangu" (Bow unto Justice) "Tharmam Thalaikaakkum" (Charity will safeguard) and so on.
While M.G.R. was dominating the Tamil film world as a successful hero he must have entertained ideas of cashing on his film popularity for his political ends. The DMK Party with its unorthodox political and social ideologies came in very handy and M.G.R. lost no time in developing strong ties with the party. Soon M.G.R. came to be acknowledged as one of the forefront leaders of the DMK taking part in almost all party activities.

His prominence in the DMK Party came to light in the year 1964 when he was elected to the Madras Legislative Council from the Madras Legislative Assembly Constituency in which the DMK had 50 members. As a leading member of the party he used to address public meetings and attend party conference. During the party conference he used to stage plays depicting party ideas. It may be added here that M.G.R. had not taken part in political agitations organized by the DMK because he had been exempted from taking part in agitations by C.N.A. himself lest they should interfere with his film career in which there was stiff competition. However, he used to be one of the important sources of finance for the party.

During this period, on a number of occasions, M.G.R. tried to identify himself with the masses, particularly with the downtrodden. For example, in 1963 he
donated rain coats to each of the over 500 rickshawmen in the City of Madras. He also tried to project himself as a patriot. For example during the Chinese Aggression in 1962 he contributed Rs.75,000/- to the Prime Minister's Fund, the largest donation made by an individual. Besides, he presented a sword of gold which earned Rs.30,000/- in an auction for the National Fund. Whenever people were hit by a flood or a cyclone he was the first to distribute money. Slum dwellers, factory workers and students have benefitted from his held. It was believed that when he ate his food, he made sure that he fed ten other fellow artistes or technicians in the studio. He has contributed large sums for public causes. These are only some instances of his generous attitude. That he had ulterior motives in these acts of generosity is a different matter. Thus M.G.R. came to be reckoned as a powerful personality in the DMK on whom the party was depending for popular and mass support especially in the rural areas. He used to draw huge crowds of both men and women wherever he went.

M.G.R. may be considered as the torch bearer of C.N.A. The DMK believed in the concept that art and politics should be used as a medium of political propagation. In 1957 the DMK contested elections for the first time in Tamil Nadu. In 1967 the party won a massive majority in the Assembly Elections and was in power till
1976. It may be stated that the charisma and personality of M.G.R. built through a series of films have been essentially responsible for the political power of DMK in Tamil Nadu. In fact M.G.R. was considered as a vote getter of the DMK. Even C.N.A. has once remarked about M.G.R. that if M.G.R. showed his face he (Anna) could get 40,000 votes and when he (M.G.R.) addressed a meeting he (Anna) could get four lakhs votes. In 1962 Karunanidhi contested for the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly from the Tanjore Constituency. His opponent Parisuththa Naadar was not only rich but also a very popular figure in Tanjore. So it was believed that Karunanidhi would be defeated in the election. This news reached M.G.R. who was touring in Kanchipuram where C.N.A. was contesting. M.G.R. immediately rushed to Tanjore and started campaigning for Karunanidhi. As a result Karunanidhi won in the election and C.N.A. lost in Kanchipuram. (About the victory of Karunanidhi, M.G.R. remarked that "Karunanidhi's victory is my victory"61) M.G.R. himself secured the highest margin of votes in his first election contested from the St. Thomas Mount constituency in 1967 as a DMK candidate.

<table>
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<th>Contestsents</th>
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M.G.R. successfully utilised his position as the most popular and sought after film hero to earn fantastic commercial returns for the producers. He also never missed any opportunity to propagate the political ideals of his party. It may also be said that M.G.R. fulfilled his own ambitions in his career in politics and films.

The 1967 elections saw for the first time an alignment of political forces on a large scale, with all the opposition parties, the DMK, Swatantra, Muslim League, Communist Party, Forward Block and so on coming together and forming a common platform for fighting the Congress. Barely a month or so to go for the fateful elections in 1967, an attempt on the life of M.G.R. whose candidature had been announced, was made by M.R. Radha (the former's professional political enemy). Fortunately, M.G.R. survived but he had to be hospitalised for more than two months. In fact, at the time of the elections M.G.R. was still in the hospital nursing the bullet wounds. This incident came as a blessing in disguise for the DMK which appealed to the
sympathy of the voters all over the State. Besides himself winning the election, M.G.R. helped the DMK Party also secure a convincing majority. Full page advertisements in the leading dailies, wall posters and hand bills bearing the picture of M.G.R. in the hospital with bandages went a long way in mopping up the support of the voters.

Besides M.G.R.'s role in DMK's victory at the 1967 poll, the 1965 government of India, announcement to make Hindi the sole official language of India, and the subsequent violent anti-Hindi agitation spearheaded by the DMK in which more than fifty lives were lost owing to police firing, and the band handling of the situation by M. Baktha-vatchalam, who had succeeded Kamaraj as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu were advantageous to the DMK.

After the 1967 elections the DMK with C.N. Annadurai as the Chief Minister, formed the first ever non-Congress government in the State. When the DMK Ministry was formed and sworn with M.G.R. still in the hospital, it is believed that C.N.A. had sent the list of his Council of Ministers to M.G.R. for his opinion. This proves his importance in the party and the importance given to him by C.N.A. The DMK suffered a terrible blow when on February 3, 1969, the founder-leader of the DMK and the Chief Minister, C.N.A., died of cancer. With C.N.A.'s death there was a big
question mark in the DMK with regard to the leadership of the party and government. This question had become all the more difficult as C.N.A.'s had never given any clue as to who his political successor would be. The two chief contenders were V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, General Secretary of the party and the No. 2 man in C.N.A.'s Cabinet and M. Karunanidhi, the Party Treasurer and the No. 3 man in the cabinet. Nedunchezhiyan contended that he should be the natural choice because of his seniority in the party and the cabinet. Karunanidhi had claimed the backing of the majority of the members in the legislature wing of the party. Both of them were staking their claim to the converted leadership of the legislature party. A showdown was imminent but it was averted, thanks to the diplomatic role of M.G.R. who also played the role of a King maker by holding consultations with the party legislators. He was able to bring about a settlement on the question of leadership. In the bargain Karunanidhi emerged victorious by virtue of his strong hold on the party, built in the course of several years. In contrast, Nedunchezhiyan lacked gross root backing and had to bow out of the contest as well as of the Cabinet formed by Karunanidhi. The leadership question was not over with the choice of a successor to C.N.A. The party had to elect a new General Secretary within a few months after Karunanidhi took over as Chief Minister. The same two personalities
clashed once again for the number one position in the party. A showdown once again looked inevitable but thanks to the political ingenuity of Karunanidhi, a new party post, that of the President was created to accommodate both Karunanidhi and Nedunchezhiyan in the party offices. Nedunchezhiyan was offered the General Secretaryship of the party and he also agreed to join the Karunanidhi's Ministry. M.G.R. was the greatest beneficiary in this bargain. He emerged as a definite force to reckon with within the party and was appointed as Treasurer of the party by Karunanidhi.

It was widely believed that M.G.R. demanded a place in the Cabinet in return for his support to Karunanidhi in the leadership issue. As a compromise the Treasurership of the party was said to be offered to him by Karunanidhi.

M.G.R.'s appointment as the Treasurer of the DMK, besides further consolidating and legitimizing his position in the party gave him ample opportunities to get into wider contacts with the masses, so much so that the DMK had to depend mostly on M.G.R. for rural votes. M.G.R. took active part in the mid-term elections and he suspended even his film assignments to devote his whole attention to the poll campaign. M.G.R. himself was re-elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly from the St. Thomas Mount Constituency. The party's performance in the 1971 elections
to the State Assembly and to the Lok Sabha was incredible in that it won in all the Lok Sabha Constituencies it had contested besides bagging more than two thirds majority in the Legislative Assembly, 184 seats out of 234 seats in the Assembly (See Table - 3:7).

It is worth noting here that the Congress, headed by Mrs. Gandhi, which contested only ten seats with the DMK backing, won all the ten seats it contested to the Lok Sabha. This time there was no contest for the leadership of the DMK Legislature Party, Karunanidhi being the natural and automatic choice.

It was once again believed that M.G.R. renewed his demand for inclusion in Karunanidhi's Ministry, which was denied by Karunanidhi. This perhaps was the beginning of what later proved to be an irreparable rift between M.G.R. and Karunanidhi.

In the meantime Karunanidhi had different ideas of dealing with M.G.R. who with strong mass popularity based on film glamour threatened to be a potential source of danger to Karunanidhi's position in the party.

Karunanidhi's plan was to produce a counter to challenge M.G.R.'s popularity in the films. With this end in view he brought in his own son M.K. Muthu as an instant film hero in one of his own films. He also suggested
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*Three more seats to be filled from Nagpur, Ladakh and Mandi. Source: The Hindu, March 19, 1971.
that the thousands of M.G.R. fan clubs all over State which were the backbone of M.G.R.'s popularity both in films and politics be wound up forthwith. This suggestion and Karunanidhi's earlier move of bringing his son as the counter hero in films seemed to rub M.G.R. on the wrong side. About this time, M.G.R. and Karunanidhi had a series of differences of opinion with regard to major governmental policy decisions like the scrapping of prohibition, a policy dear to the late C.N.A. and M.G.R. himself. Karunanidhi lifted prohibition inspite of M.G.R.'s open opposition.

Thus the gulf between M.G.R. and Karunanidhi widened and the inevitable happened when M.G.R. demanded at a party conference in Madurai in 1972 that Karunanidhi should furnish accounts for the party funds used by him. This was a serious allegation on the integrity of Karunanidhi despite the fact that it was M.G.R. who was the Treasurer of the party. M.G.R. persisted with his demand for accounts and Karunanidhi who was waiting for an opportunity to 'deal' with M.G.R., suspended him from the party. Thus, the inevitable had happened. M.G.R. retaliated in the most powerful way by breaking away from the DMK party and founding a new party of his own "Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK)."