FORMATION OF NUCLEUS AND THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN STIMULUS

(1929 - 1934)
The formative period after the Chingleput Conference till the conclusion and return of E.V.R. and S.Ramanathan from their European tour on 11th November 1932, the SRM had witnessed a process which was working towards widening the parameters of the ideology by atheistic and pro-socialistic dimensions.

From 15th December 1929 to 11th January 1930 E.V.R. along with his wife Nagammal and with some of his lieutenants namely, S.Ramanathan, Sari Chidambaramar, Mayavaram C.Natarajan, Poovaiyur A.Ponnembalam and Nagai Kaliappan* had paid a visit to Malaya, Singapore, Penang, Kolalampur and Malacca.¹ This tour was undertaken partly at the request of the immigrant Tamils of the host countries and partly with a view to propagate the self-respect ideals there and to secure subscribers to the Kudi Arasu from the Tamil readers of these states.² The

* Nagai Kaliappan commenced his visit earlier.

1. Kudi Arasu, 15-12-1929, 19-1-1930. PRLRGC.

2. Information collected from an interview arranged with N.B.Kaliappan, op.cit.
Malaya tour of the leaders was partly justified on the ground that but for the considerable number of Malay Tamils' subscription to the *Kudi Arasu*, the paper would have succumbed to the risk of running at a loss.\(^3\)

'Revolt', the English weekly, in the beginning of its second year had ceased from its publication in 1930 due to financial crisis. The loss of 'Revolt' to the SRM was compensated by the circulation of *Thondan, Suyamariyathai Thondan, Kumaran* and *Dravida*, the Tamil weeklies, being published from Tiruchirappalli, Brode, Karaikudi and Madras respectively. Besides these, by 1931, the *Kudi Arasu* publications was able to release a series of books, the contents of which were either published already in the form of serials or articles or in the form of just reproduction of the speeches of the leaders of the SRM. The many-sided propaganda techniques adopted by it had helped to organize two more provincial level self-respect conferences, successfully. These conferences were the testimonies to

\(^3\) *Kudi Arasu*, 5-5-1929, PRLRC.

* For a while it came out as a monthly also.
the strength against Congress Brahmins in Tamil Nadu.

The second Provincial Self-Respect Conference was held at Erode on 10th and 11th of May 1930, under the Presidency of M.R. Jayakar. Under the same roof, separate conferences for women, youth, prohibition and music were conducted under the Presidency of Dr. Mrs. Muthulakshmi Reddy, P. Chidambaram, T. Ramachandran and K. Ponniah respectively. The following resolutions were passed in addition to the resolutions that were passed at the Chingleput Conference.

(1) Supports the bill seeking to abolish the Devadasi system in the Madras Presidency.

(2) Resolves to launch satyagrahas for the people who are socially suppressed and oppressed by others in the society.

(3) Requests the Government to treat the arrested leaders who were arrested during the South Indian Railway strike as first class prisoners.

4. Kudi Arasu, 18-5-1930, PRLRC.
The third Provincial Self-Respect conference that followed on 6th and 7th June 1931 at Virudunagar, adopting the same organisational procedures like that of its earlier one, but under the Presidentship of Harsingh Gaver, turned into anti-Hindu, anti-God, anti-Congress, anti-khadar and anti-Hindi. Thus the SRM had earned the opposition of the yet another section of theistic but liberal minded people in the society. The following are the resolutions which did not explicitly figure at the Brode conference. 5

(1) All religions should go.

(2) Government interference is necessary to reform the society on national lines.

(3) Since khadar is associated with Congress and Brahminism, it should also go.

(4) The Government should not declare holidays for the festivals.

(5) The central organisation of the Self-Respect Movement should be registered and should take on all India status.

5. Kudi Arasu, 16-8-1931, PRLRC.
From one of the above resolutions it could be deduced that a Movement capable of holding several taluk, district and Provincial level conferences for the last five years since its formation was unable to get itself registered by the Government. This clearly indicated that the SRM was, in the midst of mass illiteracy, growing nationalist feeling coupled with its tirade against foreign imperialism and against the onslaught of the opposition press and due to its reliance more on the moneyed leaders, unable to build a mass-based organisation. Moreover, the organisational work of the SRM, involving regular enrolment of members and maintenance of income and expenditure records for the audit purpose and other regular procedures requiring legal sanctions, might have caused the SRM's inability hence reluctant to get itself registered in the beginning years of its emergence.

At a time when national upsurge and workers' consciousness and the resultant strikes and demonstrations against British imperialism were taking place, M. Singaravelu's active role and participation in
them as a radical left-wing congress in Tamil Nadu, had impressed E.V.Ramaswamy, the founder of the Self-Respect Movement. Expecting the much needed ideological support from such a selfless and well-read man of M.Singaravelu's calibre to the SRF, E.V.Ramaswamy requested him to write articles to his Tamil weekly, Kudi Arasu. 6 M.Singaravelu, who presided over the First Conference of the Indian Communists at Kanpur in 1925, and one who cherished communist ideals, must have found in the self-respect ideals an ingredient of some of the materialist concepts of communist principles. He must have been aware of its growing influence among the educated youth and workers. So, having decided to bring the SRF close to his ideology, he agreed to contribute articles to Kudi Arasu from 1931 onwards. 7

From 30th August 1931, onwards M.Singaravelu's articles either appreciating the resolutions and


activities of the SRM or by bringing out to the notice of the self-respectors the importance of incorporating the socialist programmes in their Movement as means to eradicate poverty from the land had appeared in the Kudi Arasu regularly. Though an ally of the Justice Party E.V. Ramaswamy without any hesitation encouraged M. Singaravelu’s articles in his paper. Impressed by his association and writings, he even went to the extent of reproducing Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto in Tamil in Kudi Arasu from 4th October 1931 to 18th October 1931. He also published a book on Lenin and Religion in Tamil in December 1931 before he left for European countries.

M. Singaravelu’s continuous communist propaganda through the columns of Kudi Arasu and the glories of the Russian Revolution and the atheistic structure of its Government and a consequent desire to see a government of that type personally had been the main influencing factors that worked behind E.V. Ramaswamy’s commencement of the Russian and European tour on 13th December 1931. More particularly his Russian trip was arranged by M. Singaravelu’s friend and Indian born British communist Saklatwala.

E.V.R. and S. Ramanathan had spent about eleven months in visiting Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Germany, England, Italy, Spain, France, Portugal and Ceylon. Among the countries they had visited they spent about three months in Russia alone. There they met people, observed their ways of life and the system of their government machinery and functionaries, talked to leaders and got acquainted with them and their organisations.

They returned to Erode on 11th November 1932. Meanwhile in the absence of E.V.R. along with his wife Nagammal and brother E.V. Krishnaswamy, C.E. Chidambaramar, A. Ponnambalam, Pattukottai Azhagiriswamy and a host of others representing various Tamil districts of the Presidency, as usual, by way of contributing articles to the media and by way of organising meetings, worked towards the popularity of the E.V.R. This was acknowledged by the editor of the Kudi Arasu in the paper. The editorial said that despite the founder's absence, the Kudi Arasu had not suffered from any decline in its circulation. E.V.R. too after his return from the European tour had expressed his

9. Kudi Arasu, 1-5-1932, PRLRC.
happiness over the manner in which the efforts were taken by his followers for the growth of the party during his long sojourn. In fact, during that interval, district conferences for Madras, Salem, Tanjore, Ramanathapuram and Tiruchi were held. The publication of Sandamarutham (daily), Samaram (monthly) and Tamizhan (weekly), all in Tamil, from Tiruchi, Palani and Kolar Thangavayal respectively, by carrying out the ideals of the SSM, gave valuable support to its growing influence. During the period and after, more of foreign literature had found its place in the official organs of the SSM. However, the actual propaganda machinery of the SSM during the period was centred more on paper than on platform.

The Communist leanings of the though not explicitly pronounced while E.V.R. was at home, before he left for Europe, in his absence, it had definitely took a path towards it with a hope of getting the blessings of its founder on his home return. This was achieved more particularly by the communist

10. Kudi Arasy, 13-11-1932, PRLRC.
propaganda of M. Sengeravelu, P. Jeevanandam, S. Guruswamy and Nagai Murugesan, through the columns of *Kudi Arogy* and through public meetings. Such an ideological shift that had taken place to the SRM was disliked not only by those who professed different religions but was disliked even by the active self-respectors, namely, M.P.A. Soundarapandian and V.V. Ramanwamy, both of them hailed from a wealthy background from Ramanathapuram district. They developed differences with the SRM when E.V.A. was away from home. Still indecisive about their leaving the SRM they decided to withhold their party activities until E.V.A.'s return to Tamil Nadu, with a hope that their leader after having been informed of the new ideological stand which was contrary to the social reform ideals of the SRM, might in the larger interests of it, get rid of the radical elements from it.  

11. *Kudi Arogya* 5-6-1932, [NLBG].

12. *Kudi Arogya* 23-1-1933

And information collected from an interview arranged with Nagai Murugesan, an activist of the SRM (in the formative years of it) on 1-10-1930 at Egmore, Madras.
1. The Foreign Stimulus

E.V.R. had returned from his European tour on 11th November 1932. Immediately after his return to Broda, he brought on two changes in the Kudi Arany, the official media of the SRM. Through Kudi Arany, he appealed to the self-respectors that they should in future address themselves as Thoshar (comrade). Accordingly the Kudi Arany from its next issue onwards called the self-respectors Thoshar. Brahmanophobia words, so far widely found place in the Kudi Arany as catchwords for propaganda had been to a greater extent replaced by socialist propaganda slogans like "Hail Revolution!", "Hail Communism!", "Long Live Russia!" These two steps taken by E.V.R. had indicated to his supporters and opponents as well, as to how much was he influenced by the Russian system of Government. It also revealed that E.V.R. was about to give soon a different orientation to the SRM. A section of the self-respectors were afraid of this impending ideological metamorphosis of the SRM, but those who believed in socialist ideals (in the Movement) were happy


14. Ibid., 20-11-1932, PRLRC.
to work towards that direction. For the first time the editorial of the Kudi Aram dated 4th December 1932, openly declared that thereafter the SRM would work for the eradication of poverty and for the establishment of a casteless and class-less socialist society. It added, the SRM would fight against British imperialism and capitalism in the country to achieve its goal. At the first Madurai district Self-Respect conference held at Madurai on 17th and 18th December 1932, under the Presidentship of M. Singaravelu, 'socialism' was declared an ideal of the Self-Respect Movement. Finally at Erode, E.V.R. called a meeting of the self-respectors on 28th and 29th December 1932, to decide about the future programme of the SRM in accordance with the changing times and its needs. Delegates numbering about two hundred, from the Tamil districts attended the meeting. A wealthy section of the SRM and the Justice Party members, knowing the probable outcome of the deliberations did not turn up for the meeting. M. Singaravelu's Ten-Point radical programmes were placed before the meeting of

15. Kudi Aram, 25-12-1932.PRLRC.
16. Kudi Aram, 1-1-1933.PRLRC.
17. Refer Appendix-V.
the delegates for their approval. These programmes raised doubts regarding their validity for being incorporated into the S.R.M. as its ideals, hence hotly debated for two days by the participants. Ultimately to give due weight to the feelings of a section of the self-respectors who opposed the S.R.M. of its being taken to radical politics and to avoid the imminent split within it as a result of it, under the common headship of G.V.R. it was decided that the S.R.M. would function separately as Self-Respect Samadharma Party of South India and the Self-Respect League, whereas the former a political and economic organisation and the latter would confine its activities to social reform programmes only as before. It was unanimously agreed upon by the participants of the meeting that efforts like extensive propaganda through press and platform, formation of new branches of the M.S.R.M., reactivating the existing branches with proper enrolment of members and periodic reports about their work, increasing the financial position of the organisation by contributing and collecting donations and by increasing the number of subscribers to Kudi Arayu, Prouthariva and other media of the M.S.R.M. would alone help achieve its aims and objectives.
The SSRM was set to work with additional responsibility. It had to uphold and propagate the socialist ideals to the masses. The socialist section predominantly encouraged by leaders like M. Singaravelu and P. Jeevanandam made a consistent propaganda through the columns of Kudi Arasu. Articles highlighting the achievements of the Russian Government through five year plans after the socialist revolution and Lenin's articles on 'Socialism and Religion', under the banner of Marxism, translated by S. Ramanathan and E.V.R. and serialised into Kudi Arasu and a book briefly dealing with the 'socialist philosophy' in Tamil published in 1934 by the Kudi Arasu publications, seemed to enlarge the ideological base of the SSRM. And at every district Self-Respect conferences presided or participated by or spoken by E.V.R. as a leader and a speaker, the necessity of establishing a society on the pattern of Russia was recommended and stressed for Tamil Nadu. Meanwhile in 1933, Nagammal, E.V.R.'s wife and an activist of the SSRM died. An attempt seeking the help and co-operation of the non-Brahmin leaders, trade unionists, editors and Congress

18. Kudi Arasu, 11-12-1932, PRLAC.
Kalyanamunudram was made by E.V.R. for the growth of the Self-Respect Samadharma Party of South India and on that occasion the portraits of Lenin and Nagammal were unveiled by the leaders at Brode.\textsuperscript{19} P. Jeevanandam, Bharatidasan and others wrote poems expounding the cause of socialism and rationalism in the columns of \textit{Kudi Arasu Puratchi} and other magazines. In order to raise funds for the growth of the Party, an appeal was made to the interested donors even in foreign countries. Donors' names and particulars regarding their contribution were published in the \textit{Kudi Arasu}.\textsuperscript{20} P. Jeevanandam toured various parts of Tamil Nadu and took special interest in opening more branches upholding socialist ideal in Tamil districts. By 1933, about four hundred and sixty Self-Respect Samadharma Leagues were formed in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Puratchi}, 3-12-1933, PRLRC.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Kudi Arasu}, 15-1-1933, PRLRC.

By far, the SRFV took an anti-British and pro-Communist stand. When the judgement was released on the Meerut conspiracy case, Kudi Arasu, came out criticising the inhuman judgment passed on the alleged conspirators - communists whose services to the hapless masses and their commitment to a noble cause would never be forgotten by posterity.22 Again a theoretical stand regarding the unity of the workers for the establishment of a socialist government in Tamil Nadu was found an essential part of the party's programmes. By this time, R.V.R.'s editorial "Why the present rule should go?" appeared in Kudi Arasu. It criticised the British Government for its inability to curb the rise in taxes paid by the poor, price-rise and growth of the educated unemployment. It held, that a government of that type favouring a few rich at the cost of many poor should go.23 In 1933, a conference of Atheists organised by the SRFV was held in Madras. M.Singaravelu, presided over the conference. In his address he had advocated the necessity of one being a Marxist-Atheist to redeem

22. Kudi Arasu, 22-1-1933, PRLRC.
23. Kudi Arasu, 29-10-1933, PRLRC.
the society from poverty and ignorance. A provincial level Samadharma Conference, for the first time after its formation was held at Mannargudi on 3rd and 4th March 1934. The conference had unanimously adopted the Erode programmes. Subsequently, the Provincial Self-Respect League Central Committing Meeting held at Madras on 11th March 1934 had decided to enrol at least thousand members from each and every Tamil districts before 13th June 1934. On behalf of the MSRSM, from 1st May 1934 onwards, every year to develop, renew and assert workers' unity and solidarity, it was declared that the day would be remembered and celebrated with public meetings and rallies all over Tamil Nadu. Women's property inheritance rights and rights to limit their families were strongly advocated by the MSRSM. Self-Respect Marriages were undertaken all over Tamil districts as before. In all and in the absence of any demonstration or strike on the issues concerning the labourers and the non-Brahmins, being content with verbal propaganda through press and platform,

24. Pratishthi, 31-12-1933, PRLRC.
25. Pratishthi, 22-4-1934, PRLRC.
the SRM had strongly taken the anti-British, anti-Brahmin, anti-Congress, anti-Gandhi and anti-God and anti-religious stand.

Even this limited work was undertaken amid government repression, inner-party non-co-operation and opposition party's criticism. The government of Madras ever since S.V.R.'s European tour, was closely watching his activities and the role of the SRM in Tamil Nadu. During the period between 1932 and 1934 the government indiscriminately unleashed repression on the Congress and socialist organisations in India. In Tamil Nadu, in order to stamp out the growing influence of the Self-Respect Samadharma Party and, Kudi Aran, the official media of the party, the government demanded thousand rupees each from the printer and publisher as deposit. Since it could not pay the deposit the Kudi Aran ceased its publication, as expected and as desired by the Government. In its place from 26th November 1933 onwards, Puratchi another Tamil weekly from Erode began to carry out the socialist propaganda. E.V.R. for his article "Why this Government should go?" and his sister Kammalal who was Kudi Aran's printer and publisher were arrested on
20th December 1933 by the Government, on charges of sedition. Hardly a year had passed since the starting of the weekly Puratchi, its editor and E.V.R.'s brother E.V.Krishnaswamy was arrested on 2nd June 1934, and was released on bail. Sedition was the charge levelled against him. His office was searched and raided. In addition to that, two thousand rupees were demanded as security. So Puratchi had to be replaced by Pacutharivu from 26th August 1934 onwards. Simultaneously in July 1934, the communist party of India was banned by the Government. This was followed by large scale arrests and police reprisals on the party workers and sympathisers.*

E.V.R. was released from jail on 15th May 1934. While he was undergoing imprisonment, he came in contact with C.Rajagopalachari. Against the background of Government's strong opposition to the Self-Respect Samadharma Party and consequent oppression unleashed on it, C.Rajagopalachari was able to convince E.V.R. on the

* The government was of the opinion that the growing Communist activities in India was caused by the encouragement of the Russian government which had ideological differences with the British Government.
dangers embodied in the new wing of the SRM which he led at that time. But he was unable to bring him (E.V.R.) into the fold of the Congress due to his uncompromising Brahmanophobia stand. At last, this situation was timely exploited by the Justicites who were in power and were aspiring for E.V.R.'s association to strengthen their party against the Congress. When the other self-respectors, to name some of them, S. Ramaswathan, R.K. Shanmugan, W.P.A. Soundarapandian, Cho. Murugappan and K.A.P. Viswanathan, who opposed the Self-Respect Samajavma Party right from the days of its emergence, the Justice Party prevailed upon E.V.R, who after a dialogue with the government slowly withdrew himself from his socialist activities and associations. Ultimately all coercive methods pursued by the Justice Party Government, in cooperation with the British against the SRM's official media and against the publishers, editors and printers, meant to break the founder's connection and association with socialism, ended in its favour. Thenceforth articles pertaining to Justice Party activities began to appear in the Prayutharivu, Kaivalyan Swamigal, reappeared again, with his usual lucid rationalist crusade in the Prayutharivu after a sufficient break. There revealed that the SRM had again begun