

## Chapter V

### PERIYAR AND POLITICAL AWAKENING

Periyar was drawn into a series of public activities before he became a member of the Congress. He got an opportunity to play his public role due to the outbreak of plague in Erode in 1915. He organised relief works with the help of his friends and distributed food and money to the distressed. This activity earned him the good will of the people and was claimed that Periyar was a man with potentials for leadership and that he could be entrusted with public responsibilities. The newly acquired image as a social worker and his own status as the son of wealthy man of the locality, made him serve on various temple committees, in the local taluk board and finally elected as the Chairperson of Erode Municipality in 1917.

The non-Brahmin members of the Tamilnadu branch of the Congress on 20 September 1917, to represent and safeguard non-Brahmins interests in the national organistaion founded the Madras Presidency Association. Periyar contacted the members of the association in 1919 and it was considered as his direct political involment. The association repudiated the claims of the Justice Party to be the sole representative of the non-Brahmin castes in the Madras Presidency.<sup>1</sup> The Madras Presidency Association demanded a full communal representation in legislature from the British government.<sup>2</sup> Periyar was attracted by its aims especially non-Brahmins and he actively participated in the association. He became familiar with the

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<sup>1</sup> *New India*, Madras 7 September 1917; T.V.Kalyanasundaranar, *Thiru.V.K., Valkkaikurippukkal* (T) Madras, 1969, pp.246-259.

<sup>2</sup> *New India*, Madras, 22 September 1917.

programmes and policies of Indian National Congress. Its efforts to raise the condition of the masses and do away with untouchability, prohibition and spread of *khadhi*, impressed him. The Congress held views similar to his views on social order in the Madras Presidency.<sup>3</sup> Though he was still undecided to join the Congress, his two friends Dr.P.Varadarajulu Naidu and C.Rajagopalachari urged him to join the Congress not merely to achieve political independence for the country but to fight for the social inequalities prevalent in the society. Ultimately on C.Rajagopalachari's advice, Periyar decided to join the Congress in 1920.<sup>4</sup>

Immediately he resigned all the public posts he held. He gave up his lucrative wholesale dealership in grocery and agricultural product and closed his newly started spinning mill. His annual income was Rs.20,000, a princely figure in those days where the price of eight grams of gold was not even ten rupees. During the interim period between 1919 and 1920, he was not active in politics. He utilised this period to build up his image in Congress circles as a forceful speaker and one of the chief exponents of Gandhian political concepts in the Tamil districts. His speeches were made in colloquial Tamil, enriched with wit and sarcasm and withy pithy sayings and homely proverbs. In spite of his inadequate education, he succeeded in handling the Tamil language with great facility and forthrightness, so as to rouse the political consciousness of illiterate masses.<sup>5</sup> He addressed many public meetings and soon earned a name for himself as one of the top ranking speakers in

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<sup>3</sup> An Admirer, *Periyar E.V.Ramasami: A Pen Portrait*, Erode, 1962, pp.17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Periyar, 'Enathu Kolkai Atarav Marrattirku Karanam' (T), *Tantai Periyar 90-vatu Antu Piranta Nal Malar* (T) Madras, 1968, p.23.

<sup>5</sup> Balasubramaniam, K.M., *Periyar E.V.Ramasami*, Erode, 1947, pp.37-39.

Tamil. His repudiated role in the sequent Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920, in the prohibition campaign and in the campaign launched to replace foreign cloth by the progressive use of *Khaddar* helped him to rise quickly in the hierarchy of Madras Presidency Congress hierarchy. In 1920 he was elected President of the Congress<sup>6</sup>.

Periyar toured in the countryside to introduce the *charka* as a means of economic emancipation of the poor and as an expression of political *swaraj*. He was arrested on 11 September 1924 during the *khadi* campaign for inciting hatred against the British government. Prohibition was another item of the constructive programme of the poor and imparting a sense of self-respect. His crowning success was the anti-untouchability agitation at Vaikom in 1924 with the object of throwing open public roads to the untouchables. This was the first campaign for the removal of the practice of untouchability and it was organised and conducted mostly by Tamils.<sup>7</sup> The Akalis from Punjab also supported the Vaikom agitation. They organised to supply men and material to the agitators.<sup>8</sup> Periyar made it a nationwide issue and attracted people against the inhuman activities of Brahmins. With the support of non-Brahmins from all parts of India, the ban was removed and it was considered a great success<sup>9</sup> in the social history of Malayalis.

Periyar wanted to introduce communal representation in the elections to the legislative bodies and appointments in government jobs according to

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<sup>6</sup> An Admirer, *Periyar E.V.Ramasami: op.cit.*, p.19.

<sup>7</sup> *Swarajya*, Madras, 29 April 1924.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Hindu*, Travancore, 17 June 1925.

the population.<sup>10</sup> This was supported by Somasundaram Pillai, V.O.Chidambaram Pillai and Dandapani Pillai and a number of advocates in the Congress. He was personally averse to accepting political or administrative posts during these years but he was of the opinion that non-Brahmin representation in the legislature and in offices in proportion to their population was necessary for social progress and equality. This particular programme became a permanent item in Periyar's plan of action through out his life. Periyar's move to convert the Congress on the communal representation did not succeed but produced a sharp reaction at a rival non-Brahmin Congress meeting at Kanchipuram under M.Singaravelu Chettiar. This meeting failed and dispersed amidst confusion.<sup>11</sup> While the communal controversy and the procedure it was handled in the Congress sessions provided the immediate provocation, deeper was Periyar's disillusionment with the politics of political parties which was proving to be inadequate to solve social problems. In the Congress also, it was the constructive programme rather than the political that attracted Periyar. He was a constructive worker, who was never looking for a political office. His conviction that social equality could not be achieved through the Indian National Congress. He considered social inequality, a perennial impediment to social and economic progress for a large majority of people in the country.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anaimuthu.,V. *Periyar EVR Chinthanaigal*, (T),Vol.I, Tiruchanapalli, 1974,pp.515-16.

<sup>11</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, 23 November 1925.

<sup>12</sup> Veeramani.K.(ed.), *Tanthal Periyar E.V.Ramasami's* 112 Birth Commoration Souvenir, Madras, 1990, pp.230- 31.

Periyar was not very clear about his own political future. He was not a careerist but an activist. Ever since he entered public life, he was consistently pulling forth his ideology unmindful of the consequences and unconcerned about his own political prospects. Politics and political power appeared to him meaningless in a society made up of unequal members. So he came out of the Congress and started the Self-Respect Movement<sup>13</sup>. A comprehensive programme towards that aim was soon chalked out which consisted of action in the areas of religion, social relations and politics.

According to Periyar, the spirit of rationalism appeared to him irrelevant for a people lacking Self-Respect. He remarked that, nationalism was a concept evolved by a group of people, Brahmins and the educated non-Brahmins for their own selfish advantage to deceive the people. He viewed that nationalism was used by a group of selfish people as a means of exploiting the masses and acquiring an easy reputation like spiritualism used by priests to exploit the ignorant masses. To him nationalism should at its minimum provide an honest living for all the people and at a higher level provide for promotion of knowledge, education, research and decent job and foster equality, unity, self-effort and sense of truth, and banish deceit, laziness, slavery, untouchability and unapproachability. He questioned whether the fifty year old nationalism, that had arranged for jobs and positions, had done anything for social progress. He condemned them as traitors to the nation, but was opposed by the so-called nationalists.<sup>14</sup> So he feared that freedom would benefit only the upper castes, the rich and the

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<sup>13</sup> *Kudi Arasu Madras*, 1 May 1932.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May 1929.

educated and do no good to the poor and the depressed. Further it appeared that self-government was an idea projected for keeping people ignorant, irrational, and inhuman and indisciplined by blocking the roads to self-respect.<sup>15</sup>

Between 1929 and 1935, under the strain of World Depression, political thinking all over the world received a jolt with the spread of international communism. Indian political parties, movements and considerable sections of leadership were also affected by inter-continental ideologies. The Periyar Movement also came under the influence of the leftist philosophies and institutions.

Periyar toured Malaya for one month in January 1930 to propagate Self-Respect philosophy. From December 1931 to November 1932 he toured with Ramanathan in United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Greece and Turkey. Though the trip had specific purpose they made the best use of it by acquainting themselves with different socio-political conditions prevailing in those countries and by establishing useful contacts with like minded organisations. While they were in Moscow they registered themselves as members of the Anti-Religious Propaganda Association and acquainted themselves with how exactly religion was dealt with by Russian atheists.<sup>16</sup>

His visit to the Soviet Union had a deeper impact on him. He was impressed by the phenomenal progress the Russians had made in agriculture and industry and attributed this to Russian leader's ability to

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<sup>15</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 24 May 1931.

<sup>16</sup> Ramanathan.S, 'Self-Respect Movement' in *Kuttuchi Gurusami Ninaivu Malar* (T) Madras, 1966, p.40.

modernise their social and political systems. The communist system appeared to him as the best suited to deal with the social ills of this country.<sup>17</sup>

Periyar, on his return to Madras on 11 November 1932, decided to change the character of the Self-Respect Movement, as otherwise non-Brahmin's political influence in the provincial politics would wane. He made alliance with enthusiastic communist M.Singaravelu Chettiar who worked out a social-political scheme incorporating socialist and Self-Respect ideals. This marked a crucial stage of development in the Self-Respect Movement which got politicised and found compatibility with the leftists. In collaboration with M.Singaravelu, Periyar chalked out a new programme and convened a meeting of the Self-Respect general body at Erode on 29 December 1932.<sup>18</sup> M. Singaravelu explained the various forms of socialism. There arose a distinct division between radicals in the assembly. M.Singaravelu, A.Raghman, P.Jeevanandam and Periyar himself favoured entry into active politics and held that their social objectives and their political plan could be worked together and the comparatively conservative group comprising Sami Chidambaranar, S.Gurusami, Alagirisami and Ponnambalam and others were reluctant to enter in politics. Periyar held that the proposed political action would not introduce any new policy as the Self-Respect Movement

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<sup>17</sup> The magnetic pull of communism had been experienced by many thinkers during this period. For instance, Jayaprakash Narayanan, who spent seven years abroad (1922-1929) came back to India with a zeal for implanting communism in India. Jawaharlal Nehru became a socialist advocate in the late 1920s.

<sup>18</sup> Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, (T), Madras, 1983 p.140.

had always been working for the removal of disparities of various kinds, which was the core of the socialist ideals.<sup>19</sup>

The new programme envisaged the formation of two wings within the body of Self-Respect Movement, the Self-Respect Party and the Samadharma Party of South India. It was clear from the programme that the Samadharma Party would put up candidates in the elections while the Self-Respect Party and League would confine its activities solely to social reform. But both aimed at achieving political independence for the country through constitutional methods.<sup>20</sup>

They advocated nationalisation of all means of production, distribution and public transport.<sup>21</sup> The aims of the two wings of the movement were comprehensively termed the Erode Programme. When the Erode Programme was taken up for discussion at the general body, it was opposed by S.Ramanathan and Sami Chithambaranar. Periyar also reasoned that since the movement was a mass organization, its programmes, whether social, political or economic, should be oriented towards the larger interests of the masses rather than to the privileged few in the community. After a bitter opposition from S.Ramanathan, Sami Chidambaranar and others, it was adopted, and gave birth to the Self-Respect League.<sup>22</sup>

In order to gain a wider publicity to the new programme Periyar convened a Self-Respect Conference at Tiruppur in Coimbatore district in

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<sup>19</sup> The word 'Socialism' was being used in this context although on several occasions, Periyar had been using the term *Podu Uadami* (Common Ownership) in Tamil which denotes 'Communism'.

<sup>20</sup> Venugopal.P. *Justice Party and Social Justice*, Madras, 1992, pp.43-45.

<sup>21</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 1 January 1933.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

April 1933. Both wings of the Self-Respect Movement became very active in spreading atheism and communism in Tamilnadu. S.Ramanathan as the leader of the social reform wing issued pamphlets on institutional religion, the priestly caste and idol worship. These were got from Europe and translated into Tamil and made available to the public at a nominal price.<sup>23</sup> Regular translations of the works of Robert Ingersoll, Charles Bradlaugh and Bertrand Russell appeared in *Kudi Arasu* in addition to the publication regular.<sup>24</sup>

The Movement fostered a struggle of underprivileged sections of the society and to raise the standard of revolt against constituted authorities was supported by the political wing. The object of the Samadharmam Party was to remove the hindrances to socialism presented by the existence of high castes and rich classes like the *zamindars*, the *mirasdars* and the English educated sections who were accused of living on the labour of the poor workers without exerting themselves, and by the Congress and other parties were blamed for patronising those forces. It was a revolutionary step taken with the intention of establishing branches all over the country.<sup>25</sup>

Tamil weeklies like *Puratchi*, *Pakuttarivu*, *Samadharmam* and *Nagara Tutan* published articles on the ideology of the Periyar Movement and Communism. Series of articles appeared in *Kudi Arasu* during 1932 and 1933 on Bolshevism, Fascism, Nazism, Communism and the Russian revolution.<sup>26</sup> One writer in the *Vedigundu* claimed that there was no

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<sup>23</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 24 April 1933.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April 1933.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 November 1939.

<sup>26</sup> Almost every issue of *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 1932-33.

difference between the Self-Respect and Communist ideologies.<sup>27</sup> *Vedigudu* writes that Self-Respect Movement came to stay as a Communist movement and that the day was not far off when a Communist form of government would be established.<sup>28</sup> Singaravelu's article entitled Capitalism and Communism in *Kudi Arasu* on 12 November 1933, defined Communism as common proprietorship, distribution of the fruits and profits among all people, the predominance of the popular voice and a labourite rule, and appealed to the workers to strive hard to establish Communist rule in the country.<sup>29</sup>

The Self-Respect Movement volunteers and communists popularised the celebration of May Day by organising rallies and convening public meetings. Self-Respect Youth League celebrated it as a festive day, and pledged to unite the labourers and the depressed castes and lead them to socialism by rousing their spirit.<sup>30</sup> Periyar himself addressed over fifty meetings to celebrate May Day in 1933.<sup>31</sup> He toured the entire Tamilnadu denouncing all forms of private property and advocating the establishment of the Russian form of government and declared that the one best suited to the Tamil country.<sup>32</sup> He propagated Communist ideology and sowed the seeds of class and caste hatred, and created a political awakening among the workers, labourers and the alike.

The popular labour leaders like M.Singaravelu and P.Jeevanandam took prominent roles in the political wing of the movement. That led to labour

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<sup>27</sup> *Vedigundu*, Madras, 5 October 1933; NNPR, October 1933, p.568.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 October 1933; NNPR, October 1933, p.622.

<sup>29</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 12 November 1933.

<sup>30</sup> *Paguttarivu*, Madras, 1 May 1933.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 7, 14, 21, 28 May 1933.

<sup>32</sup> Baliga, B.S., Madras *District Gazetteer* Coimbatore, Madras, p.124.

trouble that was too increasing in the country as a whole, the government resolved to stem the activities of both the wings of the movement. The opportunity to take action came sooner than expected when Periyar's editorial in the *Kudi Arasu* on 1 November 1933 detailing the reasons 'Why today's government should be overthrown'.<sup>33</sup> This triggered off a chain of reactions from the government. A security of 1000 rupees from the printer and the publisher of the paper was demanded and the paper itself soon ceased to exist.

Subsequently, on 30 December 1933, Periyar was clapped into prison for his editorial in the *Kudi Arasu* and was charged with inciting the people to overthrow the constituted authority by force. But Periyar issued a statement that he had been carrying on socialist, Self-Respect propaganda to bring about social and economic equality. He did not consider it a crime to aspire for change when he was not evoking force, hatred or harassment.<sup>34</sup> However, he was imprisoned for nine months and his sister Kannammal for six months. Periyar did not pay the stipulated fine and so he accepted one more month of imprisonment.<sup>35</sup>

In December 1933, a conference of atheists was held in Madras under the presidentship of M.Singaravelu. E.V.Krishnasami, brother of Periyar published a piece *nannathikananen? Why am I an atheist*. In the meantime, P.Jeevanandam and E.V.Krishnasami were prosecuted for publishing articles related to atheism but the case was withdrawn on

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<sup>33</sup> G.O.No.998, Public Department (General), 28 November 1933; *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 1 November 1933.

<sup>34</sup> Sami Chidambaranar, *op.cit.*, p.254.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

submission of regret for publishing the material that could be considered objectionable by the government. Notwithstanding Periyar's incarceration, the movement carried on its propaganda in favour of Communism and Self-Respect. The *Kudi Arasu* and *Puratchi* with determination worked more vigorously for promotion of Self-Respect Movement.<sup>36</sup>

In 1934 and 1935 Government opposition on Periyar Movement increased. In July 1934, the government banned the Communist Party of India and the Young Workers League.<sup>37</sup> Although the Self-Respect leaders condemned this action in bold terms, they took the precaution of declaring that Samadharma Party was a non Communist organisation. Many of the Self-Respecters claimed that they were not Communists and Periyar himself withdrew his support for Communist principles entirely.<sup>38</sup> The government of Madras with determination took severe measures against the journal *Paguttarivu* and finally it was closed down. Periyar never lost his confidence; with more confidence he started the publication of the journal *Paguttarivu* but that, too, became the focus for government security demands in 1935, because of its anti-catholic articles. The Madras government came with hard on other journals owned by Periyar and he was forced to back away from much of his socialist orientation because of government pressure.<sup>39</sup>

Periyar drafted a ten point programme, which was a modified version of the Erode Programme and presented it to the Justice Party and the

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<sup>36</sup> *Puratchi*, Madras, 26 November 1933, NNPR, November 1934, p.677.

<sup>37</sup> Baliga.B.S. *Studies in Madras Administration*, Vol.II, Madras, 1960,p.83.

<sup>38</sup> Ganapathi,M. Memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru', 18 October 1936, All India Congress Committee Papers, File p. 79/1936, AICC papers Nehru Memorial Research Library New Delhi.

<sup>39</sup> G.O.No.296, Public Department (Confidential),18 February1935.

Congress. The Congress had already rejected a similar programme earlier. But the Justice Party accepted it hoping that an alliance with a mass organisation like the Periyar Movement would improve their bright chances in the forthcoming elections. Periyar made an appeal to strengthen the Justice party to work for the removal of social evils.<sup>40</sup> However, he said that the Self-Respect Movement should continue to be a propagandist movement.<sup>41</sup> So the alliances between the Justice Party and Self-Respect Movement became closer. A joint communiqué was issued by them stressing the importance of friendship between the two, stating that one could not prosper without the other.<sup>42</sup> A combined socialist Self-Respect Conference was held in Tiruchinapalli in 1935.<sup>43</sup> Though joint Conferences were organised, Periyar wanted his movement to concentrate on eradicating Brahmanism from every activity. He found that politics is an instrument to achieve his movements aim.<sup>44</sup> In this background, Periyar campaigned in favour of the Justice Party in Madras Assembly election, held on 18 February 1937, whereas the Congress defeated the Justice Party and its first ministry was formed under Rajagopalachari on 14 July 1937.

The transition that occurred in the Periyar Movement is being viewed in the context of the political development towards self-government. A Brahmin chief of the Congress, Rajagopalachari in Madras was unacceptable to Periyar and unless political power was captured, his mission could not be fulfilled. The period from 1928 to 1938 shows Rajagopalachari

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<sup>40</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 31 April 1935.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 March 1935.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 October 1935.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1935.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1937.

maneuver in the politics of alliance which ultimately succeeded in capturing the Justice Party. His success in politics lay ahead from 1938 onwards.<sup>45</sup>

Periyar was a rare personality who had never made any compromise on socio-political policies for the sake of political power or social acceptance. He never cared for power and he was in a continuous fight against socially unaccepted ideas. He was not participating as an actor on the political stage but remained the most successful king-maker in Madras politics. The goal was to realise complete independence for the Tamilians in every sense.

The alliance of the Periyar Movement with the Justice Party proved to be a failure for both with the rout of the Justice Party in 1937 elections. It caused a change in the politics of the Movement which in any case had to reconsider its alliance for the next stage of political reforms. His alliance in politics first, with the Socialists and then with the Justice Party failed but still the Periyar Movement required an organisation to play its political role in Tamilnadu.<sup>46</sup>

The *slogan* Tamilnadu for Tamilians was first raised by Periyar Movement in 1938 in protest against the introduction of Hindi in schools. In a statement to the *Madras Mail* Tamilnadu for Tamilians, Periyar strongly defended his views of his new concert. The main object of such a Dravidian State is to prevent the exploitation of the Dravidian land by non-Dravidian people or castes in the social, political, economic and other spheres.<sup>47</sup> The demand for Dravidanadu for Dravidians was nothing but Tamilnadu for

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<sup>45</sup> *Swadesamitran*, Madras, 20 May 1938.

<sup>46</sup> Rajadurai.P., *Neethi Katchi Arasu Padupattathu yarukkaga?* (T) Chennai, 1996, pp.34-35.

<sup>47</sup> *Justice*, Madras, 21 October 1944.

Tamilians. It is said that the Tamil words *tiru idam* great place is changed into *tiruvidam* and in course of time as *Dravidan*. *Dravidan* denoted the ancient race that inhabited India before the arrival of the Aryans.<sup>48</sup>

On 28 August 1944, the name of the Justice Party changed into Dravida Kazhagam.<sup>49</sup> The Kazhagam attracted the support of number of scholars. C.N. Annadurai's histrionic talents brought into its fold many actions of film fame. The chief among them were N.S. Krishnan, the notable Tamil comedian often characterised as the Charlie Chaplin of the Tamil films, and later K.R. Ramasami and others. M. Karunanithi, T.K. Srinivasan, Rama Arangannal and A.K. Velan<sup>50</sup> became the leading members of the Dravida Kazhagam and became the followers of C.N. Annadurai. C.N. Annadurai, K. Anbazhagan and V.R. Nedunchezian used the same classics to kindle Tamil nationalism by harping on the past glory of Tamilagam. Moreover they popularised *Thirukkural*, the non-sectarian ethical work of Tamilagam. Since C.N. Annadurai's entry into politics, *Thirukkural* has become a bible for the members of the Dravida Kazhagam. Owing to their literary pursuits, many Tamil scholars either became party members or staunch supporters of the Kazhagam.

In social ranking the non-Brahmins held no position of admiration for most of them were untouchables. This socially and economically oppressed group rallied round the Dravida Kazhagam, for the Congress was dominated

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<sup>48</sup> *Arivin Ellai*, (T) Speech by Periyar on 'Tamilian' delivered on 11 January 1942.

<sup>49</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 29 August 1944, and *The Hindu*, Madras, 29 August 1944.

<sup>50</sup> The Present Chief Minister of Tamilnadu Government, M. Karunanithi, is an outstanding writer in Tamil. At first he made his mark as a script writer, but later as a poet, an essayist and novelist. T.K. Srinivasan as one of the leading short story writers in Tamil. Rama Arangannal and A.K. Velan made popular themselves as script writers for films.

by orthodox and landed interests. Dravida Kazhagam adopted a flag with a red circle in the centre. The black representing the Dravidian's ignominious condition, the red emphasizing through social and political changes.<sup>51</sup>

C.N. Annadurai and others hoped that Periyar would utilise the progressive trend to consolidate the party on sound democratic lines. Periyar made a new policy statement at the first Provincial Black Shirt Conference held at Madurai in May 1946. Periyar declared the main objective and future work of the Dravida Kazhagam should be to remove the social inequalities and disabilities of the Dravidians and that the same could not be achieved except by revolution. In June 1946, Periyar instructed that every party man should wear the black shirt as his uniform. C.N. Annadurai refused to comply with Periyar's command. But Periyar insisted on his supporters to wear the black shirt, which was one of the reasons for a rift between Periyar and C.N. Annadurai. It became worsened, when C.N. Annadurai raised a sum of twentyfive thousand rupees on his own initiative to offer as a gift to the notable Tamil poet Barathithasan. But Periyar suspected that it was yet another attempt of C.N. Annadurai to build up his own image in the pretext of honoring a Tamil poet. So Periyar boycotted the function which was held on 26 June 1946 at Madras.<sup>52</sup> Until August 1947, the rift between Annadurai and Periyar remained dormant.<sup>53</sup>

In the first week of August 1947, Periyar declared that the members of the Dravida Kazhagam should boycott the Independence Day Celebrations

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<sup>51</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 27 April 1946; *Dravidanadu*, Madras, 28 April 1946.

<sup>52</sup> Parathasarathi, T.M., *D.M.K. Varalaru*, Madras, 1967, p.43.

<sup>53</sup> Maraimalayan.A., *Perarignar Annavin Peruvazhvu*,(T), Madras, 1973, pp.161-65.

scheduled to be held on 15 August 1947. Because he believed that political power would pass from the hands of the British, but not to the Dravidians, who would continue to be vassals under the Aryan Baniyas, and therefore it was not an occasion for rejoicing but one for mourning.<sup>54</sup> But C.N. Annadurai was in favour of the Independence Day Celebrations. Later he boycotted two Dravida Kazhagam Conferences on 14 October 1947 and 8 May 1948.<sup>55</sup> In 1948, when the Black Shirt Army of the Dravida Kazhagam was viewed with grave suspicion by its opponents and the government, Periyar stated that the Dravida Kazhagam had no hatred or jealousy against anybody. It did not believe in force, and had no capacity to fight and was non-violent in its own interests. As the Dravida Kazhagam was organised as a propagandist association, force as a method was ruled out.<sup>56</sup>

Periyar Movement believed that non-violence was natural to man and the Dravidians who were by nature, peaceful and friendly were pictured as beastly by the Aryan religion and *puranas*.<sup>57</sup> There was no place for force in his ideals of the Dravida Kazhagam. Periyar Movement thought that violence would only harm the Dravidians and advocated what was termed as *arappor* a non-violence war, to realize their objectives. Periyar took this political idea at a time when the Movement was looked upon as an anti-social element by the Congress government after independence. Further the movement was also undergoing a testing time by sharp divisions over organisational and

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<sup>54</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 5 August 1947.

<sup>55</sup> Parthasarathi, T.M., *op.cit.*, pp.566-567.

<sup>56</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 5 October 1948.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 December 1948.

policy issues. Periyar feared that in any trail of force, the Dravidians and not the Aryans would fall victims.<sup>58</sup>

On 14 May 1949 Periyar and K.A.Maniammai met Rajagopalachari at Tiruvannamalai and declared that meeting was purely personal. After this meeting Periyar, aged 70, and a childless widower made secret preparations to marry Maniammai who was forty five years younger than him and deposit his uncompromising views about unequal marriages in Hindu society. Periyar expressed his decision in *Viduthalai* and his intention to appoint a heir-apparent to look after his personal property and the trustee to the party funds.<sup>59</sup>

The member of Dravida Kazhagam requested C.N. Annadurai to abandon his aloofness and take a decision on the future of the Dravida Kazhagam, According to their wishes and his capacity as the general secretary, he convened the working committee on 17 September 1949 C.N.Annadurai and his supporters met in Madras and passed a no confidence motion on Periyar's leadership. The next day, under Annadurai's leadership, a new political party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was formed and pledged to adhere to the policies of the parent body, but with a genuine democratic party organisation.<sup>60</sup>

On the political front, Periyar's main concern was to curb the increasing influence of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. He adopted an anti-Congress policy, in collaboration with the Communist Party of India and

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>59</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras.19 June 1949.

<sup>60</sup> *Dravida Nadu*, Madras, 25 September 1949.

supported it in the 1952 general elections. For the Communist Party, it alliance was an unexpected success. In fact, the Communist Party emerged as the second largest single group within the legislature reducing the strength of the Congress to an uneasy working majority.<sup>61</sup> Rajagopalachari assumed the leadership of the Congress legislature Party. His controversial caste oriented educational policy met with stiff opposition from a large section of the public which forced him to relinquish his position as the Premier of Madras. This opposition was mainly due to Periyar's Movement and tactics. It was again this diplomatic campaign of Periyar which promoted the then Tamilnadu Congress Committee Chief, K.Kamaraj, to carry upon himself the mantle of Premiership<sup>62</sup>.

Periyar launched a campaign against Rajagopalachari especially when his leadership was required to safeguard the larger interests of the Tamils in the 1950's. Later historical events proved that the Tamils had a better bargaining position when the state boundaries were re-drawn consequent upon the division of the undivided State of Madras into Andhra Pradesh and the residuary State of Madras.<sup>63</sup>

When K. Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Madras on 14 April 1954 Periyar changed his posture against the Congress. He regarded Mr. K.Kamaraj as a true Tamilian who would safeguard the interests of the Tamils. Although it was not the policy of K.Kamaraj or the party to which he belonged, Periyar offered his own reasons for supporting the Congress. He

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<sup>61</sup> Gandhite A., *Kamaraj, the Shrewed*, Madras, 1961, pp.10-12.

<sup>62</sup> G.O.No. 1496, Public Department (Confidential), 5 June 1952.

<sup>63</sup> G.O.No. 2892, Public Department (Secret), 14 October 1957.

even prepared to shed his extremist policies towards Brahmins in order to make K.Kamaraj's rule a popular one.<sup>64</sup>

The Government of Madras under K.Kamaraj responded to Periyar on the subject of proper communal representation in appointments to government jobs and enrolment in colleges. The list of backward castes, eligible for concession for jobs and education were rapidly expanded.<sup>65</sup>

In the early fifties, the Tanjore Brahmins were under attack from two quarters, the Communist and his Dravida Kazhagam. Further, the two Parties worked united by for the common cause. They raised their voices against the Brahmins, the first on the ground that the Brahmins were *mirasdars* and the second was that they were Brahmins. The alliance with the staunch anti-Brahmin Dravida Kazhagam made the Communists a little wary of antagonising the non-Brahmin landowners. In Tanjore district the Communists drew much of their strength from the Dravida Kazhagam. In the elections of 1962 the Dravida Kazhagam supported the Communist candidates and held six assembly seats out of a total of nineteen from the district.<sup>66</sup>

However, the political scenario in Tamilnadu changed rapidly after the mid-fifties. The veteran Brahmin leader, C.Rajagopalachari, was replaced by a non-Brahmin K.Kamaraj, as Chief Minister and the Dravida Kazhagam, switched over its support to the Congress. The Congress enacted a series of

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<sup>64</sup> G.O.No.1059, Public Department (Secret), 9 July 1954: Viduthalai, Madras, 15 May 1954.

<sup>65</sup> G.O.No. 511, Education Department, 7 August 1957.

<sup>66</sup> Selig Harrison, *India, The Most Dangerous Decade*, New Delhi, 1960, pp.182-190.

laws curtailing the rights of landowners and many of the Brahmin mirasdars.<sup>67</sup>

Periyar was a strong critic of the Indian constitution and raised his powerful voice against the clauses and articles relating to the Hindu religion. He was of the opinion that the name of honoring traditional practices, customs and habits, the courts upheld *varna-jathi* system on the basis of the Articles 13, 25 and 372 of the Indian Constitution. As a protest against these provisions, on 26 November 1957, the Dravida Kazhagam volunteers burnt pieces of paper with these articles written on them.<sup>68</sup> The agitation aimed at eradication of castes by making the system illegal. Nearly 4000 followers of Periyar were sentenced to undergo imprisonment for different periods ranging from six months to three years. Two persons died in prison, and twenty others after their release due to the ordeal they under went in the jail in 1957.<sup>69</sup> Referring to this agitation, Periyar said that either in the history of Tamilnadu or in the history of India on others but the members of Dravida Kazhagam, numbering 3,500-4,000 went to jail in a single day on a social issue for the purpose of eradicating castes.<sup>70</sup>

Articles fourteen to eighteen of the Indian Constitution embody the general principles of equality before law and prohibit unreasonable discrimination between persons.<sup>71</sup> But Periyar in 1930 itself had a clear idea about gender justice and said a civilized society cannot think of one law for

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<sup>67</sup> G.O.No. 3337, Public Department (Secret), 29 November 1957.

<sup>68</sup> G.O.No.2349, Public Department (Confidential), 25 September 1958: Viduthalai, Madras, 26 November 1957.

<sup>69</sup> G.O.No.3471, Public Department (Secret), 10 December 1957.

<sup>70</sup> G.O.No. 73, Public Department (Confidential), 8 January 1957.

<sup>71</sup> Viduthalai, Madras, 16 April 1959.

men and another for women. This was a severe blow for the men who illtreated their womenfolk in an inhuman way.<sup>72</sup> With regard to the worker's rights, and even before Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, who declared the need for raising the status of all kinds of workers, Periyar spoke for the cause of the workers at Cochin Workers Conference on 5 September 1933 and proved himself that he was the beaconlight by framing an elaborate programme for the welfare of all kinds of workers.<sup>73</sup>

In January 1959, Periyar accepted an invitation to visit Lucknow and addressed a conference of scheduled castes, backward castes and minorities.<sup>74</sup> The success of the Anti-Hindi agitation reflected in the general election of 1967 and the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam won majority of seats in the State Legislative Assembly. Though Periyar was against C.N. Annadurai in the election campaign, when the latter became the Chief Minister in 1967, he went to his mentor Periyar and sought his goodwill and advice. The three major achievements of his ministry were the renaming of the Madras State as Tamilnadu, introduction the two language formula of Tamil and English instead of the three language formula Tamil, English and Hindi and legalisation of the self-respect marriage system.<sup>75</sup>

The spectacular victory of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam resulted in the re-union of the Dravida Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. C.N. Annadurai acknowledged Periyar as guru and Periyar rejoiced for the establishment of a truly 'Dravidian' government in Tamilnadu. Periyar

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<sup>72</sup> *The Modern Rationalist*, May 2001.

<sup>73</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 10 September 1933.

<sup>74</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 22 January 1959.

<sup>75</sup> *Arivuppathai*, Madras, 21, May 1967.

Movement extended its full support to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government. Through this government, several social reforms of the Periyar Movement were carried out by legislations and administrative orders.

In 1968, the epic *Ramayana* was burnt all over Tamilnadu as a mark of protest against domination and oppression by the Aryans. However the political stand of Periyar Movement did not permit any permanent alignment with any party. When By-election was held to Parliamentary Constituency at Nagercoil, Kanyakumari district in 1968, Periyar canvassed for the Congress candidate K.Kamaraj, and at the same time he supported the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government in the State. As the Movement's principal object was to resist and end Brahmin domination, he refrained from any action to weaken any Dravidian headed government. In another instance of the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, both Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Rajagopalachari's Swatantra Party took a leading part. Periyar Movement, though ideologically in support of their stand refrained from joining the agitation lest it should weaken the government headed by K.Kamaraj. He made a counter propaganda against the agitation and suggested recourse to referendum to ascertain the views of the non-Hindi people.<sup>76</sup>

Periyar refrained from day –to-day involment in politics, but wanted to get involved in social matters. As he always considered social preparedness for self-government as important as political, the Periyar Movement did not compartmentalise society and politics. To the Movement, political power meant the power to remove social evils, and politics unconcerned with social

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<sup>76</sup> Periyar EVR, *Hindi Ethirppu Kilarchi Oru Nilamai Vilakkam* (T) Madras, 1965, p.55.

work was not needed.<sup>77</sup> As the leader of the Movement, he announced that the primary concern was with social matters and all the policies were related to social affairs.<sup>78</sup> In 1970, he started the fortnightly Tamil magazine *Unmai*. The then general Secretary of the Movement K.Veeramani released the first issue. To popularize his ideas in 1971, Periyar launched the English magazine the *Rationalist*. The application of several of these methods were consistent with Periyar's personality and ideological movement with the sole object of affecting an ideological revolution. Duty, dignity and discipline, became the watch words of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under C.N.Annadurai, which were derived from the ideals and methods of Periyar Movement.

### **The Movement's views on Indian Democracy**

Periyar Movement believed that for progress, a good government and a people with intelligence, a good conduct and discipline were necessary.<sup>79</sup> *Samadharmam* or socialism was described as removal of the degradation of the Dravidian race, abolition of caste, equal property and provision of food, education, housing for all.<sup>80</sup> According to him, democratic government grew out of the need to lead an ignorant and exploited masses unconscious of the injustice practiced on them to help them to shed their shackles and become equal and self-respecting citizens of a free nation. It was not his movement to fulfil the wishes of the people or follow the dictates of the majority, and that the people and the majority were not intelligent or rational and did not know

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<sup>77</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 29 June 1946.

<sup>78</sup> Anaimuthu.V., *Periyar EVR Chinhanaikal*, (T),Vol.II, pp.09-10; Viduthalai, Madras, 14 October 1951.

<sup>79</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 6 August 1966.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1966.

what was good for them. Periyar did not pretend to be a democrat but he professed to be a chief leader of the masses. In this context, one may note that unlike many other contemporary thinkers, Periyar was completely detached from tradition and the totally devalued concepts like the genius of the people.<sup>81</sup>

The functioning of the democratic government in independent India further hardened his dislike of the democratic system. In his characteristic way of attacking everything considered pernicious to social good. Periyar was a strong critic of democratic government, the role of money power in election, the voters' ignorance, and unscrupulous defections.<sup>82</sup> The democratic corruption and misconduct, as he termed it, was said to be prevalent not only among the intelligential and the rich and but in the government, Therefore these could not be legally abolished.<sup>83</sup> Periyar condemned the electoral system as a system that had made the candidates public dishonest.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, Periyar was so horrified at the degeneration of the electoral system and the parliamentary type of government that he even went to the extent of telling that these were not suitable to India. He was of the view that politics had so very corrupting influences that turned everyone dishonest and cheat. He believed that justice, fair play and honesty had no place in democracy. To remedy the situation he wanted to have an autocratic government without political parties and without elections. His view was that

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with V.Anaimuthu, Chennai, 25 December 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Periyar EVR, *Jananyakam* (T), Madras, 1956.p.9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

democracy had given the rulers great opportunities to exploit the people and was doing immense harm to the ruled.<sup>85</sup>

Periyar's strong criticism on democracy appeared as an argument for the abolition of district boards and was based on his observation of corrupt practices widely prevalent to win elections and to retain power. In his opinion, a good government is one that gives good protection to the people.<sup>86</sup> The socio-political system in India appeared to Periyar as neither independent nor democratic, for it protected many kinds of inequalities like master-servant, owner-worker, landlord-labourer, Brahmin-*Panchama*, *Sudra* etc.,<sup>87</sup> He considered the term democratic as the most deceitful word which gave asylum to all kinds of dishonest, selfish and deceitful people.<sup>88</sup>

Periyar lamented that political democracy in India had not brought about social equality or ended superstitions about God. According to him the democratic government had been trying to bring about equality in the economic field to remove acquired inequalities, but had no courage to remove inequalities acquired automatically by birth and imposed unlawfully by a small group over a large population in a way unknown anywhere in the world. The major drawbacks perceived by him as results of the democratic system were that the wealth of Tamilnadu were being taken out of the land the non-Tamils. The Brahmins had facilities to make laws and interpret them while Tamilians could not contemplate any action they desired.<sup>89</sup> It was the failure of the democratic government to develop intelligence, self-respect and

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<sup>85</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 29 January 1959.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August 1962.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 August 1972, and 30 April 1973.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 October 1952.

<sup>89</sup> Anaimuthu V. Periyar *EVR Chinthanaigal*, (T), Vol.II, pp.875-78.

equality. To him democratic government was protecting religion and caste and not being worried about the degradation of ninety percent of the population, the demand for more powers for states appeared meaningless.<sup>90</sup>

Within the frame of the existing political system, the reforms that Periyar considered absolutely essential.<sup>91</sup> He rejected the oft-repeated stability argument of the Congress. A stable government would not undertake any concrete measure for the uplift of the people. There could even be annual change in government in the prevailing conditions. He felt that no type of Socialism would be able to abolish inequalities in the society and that not even of Communism could obliterate inequalities perpetrated in the existence of the rich and the poor, the owner and the worker and the master and the servant.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras 27 March 1964.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 November 1972. He denounced the political defections as 'thoroughly dishonest' and exhorted the public to expose the defections and observed that the defections should resign their posts before defection and inform the party and the voters the reasons for defections and policy issues involved.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 July 1972.