

## Chapter VII

### PERIYAR AND TAMIL

In Madras, the cultural revivalism manifested itself in the publication of Robert Caldwell's work, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian of South Indian Family Languages* which revealed the distinguishing features of the Dravidian languages<sup>1</sup>. After the publication of this book, English-educated non-Brahmins, as well as few Brahmins, took interest in reviving the Dravidian languages by interpreting their literature and studying it on modern lines. This revival was shrewdly exploited for political reasons. One was by Tamilnadu Congress and another by the leaders of the Justice Party although their motives and purposes were different. The former used it for awakening the nationalist spirit, the latter employed it for narrow political purposes. In this cause Gandhi's interpretation of *swadeshi*, which covered a wide range of effects including the revival of regional languages, came in handy.<sup>2</sup>

At a reception at Mayavaram in May 1915, Gandhi was presented with a welcome address in English, which he resented because it was opposed to the spirit of *swadeshi*. In the course of his reply he said, 'I find here words of welcome in the English language. I find in the Congress programme a resolution on *swadeshi*. If you hold that you are *swadeshi* and yet print these in English, then I am not *swadeshi*. I have nothing to say against the English language. But I do say that, if you kill the vernaculars and rise the English

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian of South Indian Family Languages*, Madras, 2000, pp.198-99.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Anaimuthu.V. Chennai, 25 December 2006.

language on the tomb of the vernaculars then you are favouring *swdeshi* in the right sense of the term'.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1917 Tamil has been increasingly used as a vehicle of political expression. C.SubramaniaBharathi, P.Varadarajulu Naidu, T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, C.Rajagopalachari, Sayamurthi and other nationalist politicians in Tamilnadu contributed their share to vernacular zing politics, chiefly to proselytise the masses to Gandhian politics. The modernisation of the Dravidian languages, including Tamil, began with the impact of English education. Deeply influenced by English, the nationalist writers took to the task of transforming Tamil into a more pliable language, through which modern ideas of science and politics could be expressed. If C.Subramania Bharathi (1882-1921) distinguished himself in expressing patriotic sentiments in lyrics, C.Rajagopalachari endeavored to coin scientific terms in Tamil, although they had since fallen into disuse. His *Tinnai Rasayanam* (Pial Chemistry) is a classic example of his efforts to coin technical terms in Tamil. Whereas P.Varadaajulu Naidu, T.V.Kalyanasundra Mudaliar, Periyar and Satyamurthi showed through their political speeches that Tamil possessed potentiality as a political tool. In fact, Tamil journalism owes its present stature to T.V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from that, the Justicites and followers of Self-Respect movement with their irresistible appeal to non-Brahmins on racial and communal lines inevitably strengthened the forces of regionalism as well as Tamil

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<sup>3</sup> The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol.XIII, , Delhi, 1964 ,p.70

<sup>4</sup> Eugene F.Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India; The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism*, 1916 to 1929, California, pp.303-308.

nationalism. After the introduction of the British India Constitutional Act of 1935, the first Congress ministry took office in the Province of Madras under the leadership of C.Rajagopalachari on 14 July 1937. On 11 August, he announced to the press that Hindi would be introduced as a compulsory course of study in the school curriculum for the first three forms.<sup>5</sup> The proposal to introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in the lower forms was not part of the general programme of the Congress. However, the Congress manifesto issued before the election of 1937 had stated, without specifying the details that the Congress would endeavour to spread Hindi if it formed the ministry in the Provinces. This language policy of the Congress was based on Gandhi's concept of *Swadeshi*, which is to replace English by Hindi as the common language of the country.<sup>6</sup>

According to Gandhi, the term *swadeshi* means 'one's own'. In fact it literally means belonging to one's own country, being indigenous. Gandhi used the term not only to indicate the articles produced locally but all those that belonged to the country. For example, *khadhar* and handloom products were *swadeshi* but not the textiles of Britain or Japan. Similarly, Indian languages as against English were *swadeshi*. Gandhi and other Congress administration and politics and as the communication medium of the intelligential in various linguistic region of the country. At the same time they also appreciated the importance of English as a window on the outside world

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<sup>5</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 11 August 1937.

<sup>6</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.XIII, Delhi, 1964, pp.70-71.

through which India could assimilate modern ideas and they were also prepared to use it as the language of international diplomacy.<sup>7</sup>

However, they wanted to give it what they called the status of common language of India. In its place, Hindi was to be installed arbitrarily as the common language, not because it was as useful as English but because it was spoken by a large number of Indians and understood by other linguistic groups in the North. In May 1917, in an article "Spreading Hindi", Gandhi said, Hindi alone can become the common language of the educated people in India. This place cannot go to English, for it is a foreign language and very difficult for the Indians to learn. The number of those speaking Hindi is almost sixty five million. The Bengali, Bihari, Oriya, Marathi, Gujarathi, Rajasthani, Punjabi and Sindhi languages are the sisters of Hindi. People speaking these languages can understand and speak a little of Hindi. If we include these, the number is almost 220 million.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand Jawaharlal Nehru said that the only possible all-India language is Hindustani. Already it is spoken by 120 million and partly understood by scores of millions of people.<sup>9</sup>

In doing this the Congress leadership, which came largely from North, obviously ignored the linguistic differences between the North and the South and overlooked the strong currents of regionalism, which were an outcome of the cultural revivalism that took place half a century ago. Even then the enthusiasm for learning Hindi was confined largely to Brahmins because they

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<sup>7</sup> *Young India*, Madras, 26 December 1924,

<sup>8</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.XIII, Delhi, 1964, p.419.

<sup>9</sup> Mohan Kumaramangalam, S., *India's Language Crisis*, Madras, 1965, p.15.

evaluated the importance of Hindi in national politics as well as the employment opportunities it would provide after the formation of national government. They were eager to learn Hindi to equip themselves for their future role in national politics. Besides, learning Hindi was relatively easier for them, because of their knowledge in Sanskrit. Devanagari is the script of both Sanskrit and Hindi and Sanskrit words continue to enrich the Hindi vocabulary. On the other hand, non-Brahmins in the Congress were relatively untouched by the Hindi movement. Most of them were illiterates. So the prime concern was to educate them in their mother tongue and to give them political education, which in turn made them vernacularism politics. For the educated non-Brahmins, who were outside the Congress, Hindi offered no material benefits. For the chauvinist it had no cultural or literary value, compared to any of the Dravidian languages. Hindi was an anathema to the political opponents of the Congress.

Periyar Movement, for example, at the Virudhunagar Conference in August 1931, condemned the introduction of Hindi in national politics as a retrograde step which would benefit only the *Sanathanists*.<sup>10</sup> Thus in spite of Gandhi's support and the eagerness and the interest generated by Brahmins, Hindi could not make much headway among the large majority of the people living in the Province of Madras until 1937. The mere proposal to introduce Hindi came in for criticism from all sections of the people, the politicians, and the academicians and Tamil scholars. The Justicites, the followers of Self-Respect movement and the leaders of the Muslim League opposed the

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<sup>10</sup> Periyar E.V.R., *Namatu Kurikol* (T);, Madras,1948 p.12.

attempts to replace English by Hindi because to them it was a regional language spoken essentially in some provinces in the north and, it was much a foreign language as English is to South Indians.<sup>11</sup> Reddi Naidu an uncompromising critic of C.Rajagopalachari, questioned the very hypothesis that a common language was desirable for India, because the solidarity of the country depended, according to him, on factors other than language. The Tamil scholars were also opposed to Hindi. In 1937, they organised themselves, purely from cultural considerations, into an association called the Society for the Protection of Tamil Language. The impact of the propaganda carried on by the association and the individual campaigns of S.Somasundra Bharathi, Eelathu Adigal and Kanchi Rajagopalachariar, served not only to mobilise public opinion but also helped to unite the Tamils to a common cause. on, 26 December 1937 they held a Provincial Tamil Conference. In this conference a significant resolution was passed. In order to meet the Hindi imposition on constitutional lines, a committee consisting of Somasundra Bharathi, Periyar and T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai was formed.

But the government took no notice of the mounting opposition and did not make the teaching of Hindi as optional. On 21 April 1938 the Madras Government passed an order introducing the study of Hindi compulsory in certain secondary schools of the Presidency.<sup>12</sup> Periyar sided with the anti-Hindi campaigns and wrote a series of inflammatory editorials in *Kudi Arasu*, beginning from 8 May 1938, and urged every pure- blooded Tamilian to rise

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<sup>11</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 17 and 24, August 1937.

<sup>12</sup> G.O.No.911, Public Department (Education), 21 April 1938.

against the Aryan menace.<sup>13</sup> It gave a fillip to the whole anti-Hindi Movement. If for the North Indians English was not *swadeshi*, Hindi was *videshi*, 'foreign' for the Tamils.

Apart from strengthening the forces of Tamil nationalism, the period between 1937 and 1938 marked the emergence of Periyar as the leader of the Justice Party and the beginning of the Tamilisation of that party. The slogan 'Tamilnadu for Tamilians' was first raised in 1938 in protest against the introduction of Hindi in schools. Opposition to the linguistic domination of Hindi was one of the programmes of the Periyar Movement ever since its genesis. Periyar gave a warning in *Kudi Arasu* in 1926 that Hindi would develop as one of the dangers confronting the non-Brahmin castes and it would help only religious propaganda by Brahmins.<sup>14</sup> An editorial in *Kudi Arasu* on 20 January 1929 questioned the wisdom of spreading the knowledge of Hindi, a language that had no connection to Tamils and was of no utility, an Aryan language that taught only superstitious legends and customs and the superiority of Brahmins. It commented that English, which was an international language, should be adopted as the link language in India, and language other than English as foolish and mischievous.<sup>15</sup>

Periyar kindled a sense of linguistic patriotism on a sound Self-Respect basis that in Tamil there was no place for blind beliefs and it was more cultured than many other languages. It was feared that the introduction of other languages would intrude into the Tamil systems and introduce ideas

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<sup>13</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 29 May 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Periyar E.V.R., *Suyamariyadai Iyakkattai Totruviltatu En?* (T), Madras, 1982. p.26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

antagonistic and harmful to Tamilian interest and lead to their further degradation. The adoption of Hindi would make the Tamils more and more slavish and should be discarded. Tamil was considered the most desirable language to achieve development, progress and progressive outlook,<sup>16</sup> and not that it would work any miracle. Periyar's contention was that it was a conspiracy of Brahmins and North Indians to destroy the Dravidian art and culture through Hindi language and impose those of the Aryan and thereby re-establish the *varanshramadharm* and suppress the Dravidians as the Sudras of the *varna* order, degrade the Panchamas, and treat the Christians and Muslims as *mlechas*.<sup>17</sup> Periyar spoke at length to explain that Hindi would not only hinder the progress of Tamils but would completely destroy their culture and nullify the progressive ideas that had been successfully inculcated through Tamil in the recent decades. He called upon the people to drive out both Hindi and the North Indians.<sup>18</sup>

The anti-Hindi campaigns and demonstrations were generally described as *porattam* 'struggles'. There were not only linguistic struggles, but struggles for preservation of Tamil culture, and Tamilian rights. Anti-Hindi campaign brought together Dravidians from different political parties and united many leaders who had parted on vital policy differences. These campaigns were described as battles to rouse the feeling of Self-Respect. Periyar said that the opposition to Hindi had started soon after the Self-Respect Conference was held at Nannilam in 1930, but not after the

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<sup>16</sup> Periyar E.V.R., *Mozhi Ezhutu*,(T) Erode, 1948.p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Periyar EVR, *Hindi Por Murasu*(T) Collection of Speeches delivered at Provincial Anti-Hindi Conference at Madras on 17 July 1948, Madras, 1948, p.12.

<sup>18</sup> Ilancheliyan,M., *Tamilan Tottuta Mutal Por* (T), Madras, 1940, p.77.

publication of the government order on 21 April 1938, as contended by the government; that the picketings before Premier's house and Hindu Theosophical High School not to coerce the Premier but to show the government that anti-Hindi agitation had public support, that none of his speeches, including those that were referred to in the charge sheet, had incited any person to break the law of the state, and that, such being the case, he was not guilty of any of the charges cited.<sup>19</sup> The Magistrate sentenced Periyar to one year rigorous imprisonment and to a fine of Rs.1000 rupees in respect of each of the offences on which he was convicted. He was punished for his speech at the Women's Conference at Madras. The women who were not involved in the movement before that came out in a large procession picketed, and courted imprisonment.<sup>20</sup> The arrested figure rose to 1,001 before Periyar was released on considerations of health in April the following year.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of his imprisonment, Periyar's personal image rocketed sky high, to the bewilderment of the Congress circles. At least one public meeting was held in some of the Tamil districts to condemn the government's language policy and to support Periyar's stand against Hindi. Between 7 and 31 December 1939 over 500 meetings were held in Tamilnadu to protest against the sentence to Periyar.<sup>22</sup> He was regarded as a saviour and protector of the Tamil culture and language and was paid encomiums as

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<sup>19</sup> G.O.No.241, Public Department,3 February 1939.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Ilancheliyan,M.,*op.cit.*, p.188; G.O.No. 597, Public Department, 13 April 1939; Sami Chidambaranar, *Tamilar Talaivar*, (T) p.190.

<sup>22</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 31 December 1938; *Madras Mail*, Madras, 31 December 1938; *Swadesamitran*, Madras, 29 December 1938.

such at these meetings. Periyar's birthday was celebrated together with the anti-Hindi meetings throughout the southern part of the Province. Whether it was Periyar's birthday celebrations, anti-Hindi meetings or any other meetings convened by the Congress leaders, Periyar's portrait was either unveiled or it adorned the daises. At the conclusion of these meetings the audience stood up and took an oath to stand by Periyar and support him in his national struggle against the Hindi imperialism.

Periyar's growing popularity as the champion of the Tamils among a large section of non-Brahmins in Tamilnadu was an added incentive for the Justicites to stick to their original decision to elect him as the president of the confederation.<sup>23</sup> The birthday celebrations of Periyar were held at Madras on 18 December and Fourth Provincial Tamilians Conference at Vellore on 27 December 1938. These were significant because the presence of all non-Congress leaders in the Tamil districts and the unanimity of views they expressed on the need to preserve and the Tamils, especially in view of what they considered to be the 'Aryan rule over the Dravidians'.<sup>24</sup>

A three day, Fourteenth Confederation of the Justice Party was held at Madras on 29 December 1938 with a huge procession from Egmore to the venue of the confederation on island grounds in Mount Road. The centre of attraction of the procession was a chariot on which four life-size portraits of Periyar were put up, facing the directions and these were enclosed in a representation of a prison cell. The Tamil mother was depicted as mourning

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<sup>23</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 8 December 1938.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, December 1938.

over his imprisonment. Volunteers wore red shirts and waved red flags, with Justice Party printed on them marched ahead of the procession.<sup>25</sup>

Periyar was clear about the concept of a separate multi-linguistic nation, comprising Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada areas, roughly corresponding to the then existing Madras Presidency with adjoining areas into a federation guaranteeing protection of minorities, and religious and linguistic and cultural freedom of the people. The proposition was made with a view to save the national Self-Respect of Dravidians threatened by Aryan culture, language, political leadership, business interests, etc. A Separatist Conference was held in June 1940 at Kanchipuram where Periyar released the map of the proposed Dravida Nadu.<sup>26</sup> With the promised grant of full self-government after the war, and with the serious problem of Muslim demand for separation, this development posed another threat to the Freedom Movement but failed to be approved of the British approval. Periyar received the sympathy and support of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and M.A.Jinnah for his views on the Congress and for his opposition to Hindi. They decided to convene a movement to resist the Congress.<sup>27</sup>

Periyar started propoganda that the Tamilian had lost his Self-Respect, rationality, intelligence and rights because he considered himself as a Hindu and that he had forgotten the Tamil culture, and civilisation. Therefore, he said that to regain his knowledge, courage, rationalism and

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<sup>25</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 29, December 1938, *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 31 December 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *Justice*, Madras, 21 October 1944; *Madras Mail*, Madras, 20 November 1939; *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 9 June 1940.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 September 1939.

Self-Respect, all of which once belonged to him, the Tamilian should forget that he was an Indian or Hindu.

On 21 February 1940, the Government of Madras abolished compulsory Hindi in a bid to win the co-operation of all political parties.<sup>28</sup> Although Hindi was abolished as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, to pacify the Provisional Congress leaders it was retained as an optional subject in the first three forms and further grants were promised for its extension to the higher forms. The government made this out to be the calculation for a practical knowledge of the Hindi language among the students of the Presidency. As expected, both Periyar and C.Rajagopalachari expressed their general satisfaction at the decision of the government.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter Periyar began to speak more on the lines of dividing the country into three parts such as Dravidanadu, Muslim India and Aryan land. In all the public meetings that were held between March and June 1940, Periyar advocated the three-nation doctrine as the only solution for solving the political impasse in the country.<sup>30</sup> At a public meeting held on 4 April Periyar said that if the 'Tamils wanted to be free from the Brahmin-Banya domination in the cultural, economic and political fields' the only answer was to have a separate country for the Dravidians.<sup>31</sup>

The Periyar Movement was accompanied by a renaissance in Tamil culture and arts. To give a prominent place for Tamil songs in classical music, the Tamil Isai Sangam was established in 1940. As the Justicites took

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<sup>28</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 21 February 1940.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February 1940.

<sup>30</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, All the issues from 31 March to 16 June 1940; *Sunday Observer*, Madras, 16 June 1940.

<sup>31</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 5 April 1940; *Sunday Observer*, Madras, 14 April 1940.

strong exception to these, they passed two resolutions, one condemning the government for placing Gandhi's portraits in the same category as that of their imperial majestic and other calling for the immediate use of the Tamil honorific word *Thiruvalar* for sir.<sup>32</sup> The then Congress Government spurned these resolutions in 1937, but the Justicites and Pariyar's demands were finally fulfilled after thirty years, when the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam formed its first ministry in 1967. Since then the word *Thiru* has replaced *Sri* in all official correspondences and portraits of the Tamil poet, Tiruvalluvar, has displaced Gandhi's portraits from all the Provincial Government buildings.

The most powerful tools applied by Periyar were his speeches and forceful writings. In the writings and speeches of Periyar, over a period of sixty years certain expressions, catchwords and concepts have occurred frequently and consistently with certain associated ideas. Periyar said that the Justice Party should defend the 'rightful supremacy of the Tamil language' and oppose any 'incurious of Hindi' on the Tamil country.<sup>33</sup> The Congress rulers permitted the local boards to install Gandhi's portraits in their premises and used the Sanskrit word *Sri* instead of English word *Mister* before surnames.

On the cultural front Periyar Movement, through its grassroot organisation, brought the message of Tamil nationality to the masses. Tamil language itself acquired capability as the most powerful vehicle for the expression of modern political thought. There was a flowering of Tamil literature of a short, with Tamil scholars return back to the cultural greatness

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<sup>32</sup> *Kudi Arasu*, Madras, 7 January 1939; *Madras Mail*, 31 December 1938.

<sup>33</sup> *Madras Mail*, 31 December 1938.

of the ancient Tamils. This made easy the revival of Tamil nationalism and culture. It also expressed itself in a demand for an independent Dravidannadu in order to preserve the ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of the so called Dravidians.<sup>34</sup>

An effective demonstration of wiping out signs of Brahminism is to adopt a rational name for oneself in the place of the customary name given by parents. The changing of one's name originated at the dawn of the century by certain Tamil scholars wishing to purify Tamil of all alien, particularly Sanskrit influence, and it became one of the favourite rites among the followers of Self-Respect Movement. Swami Vedachalam, a well known Tamil *pandit* was one of the earliest to change his name as Maraimalai Adigal, a literal Tamil translation of his first name. In the early part of the century a Brahmin Tamil *pandit* V.K.Suryanarayana Sastri changed his name from the Sanskrit to its literal rendering admired for it by non-Brahmins who called him Dravida Sastri.<sup>35</sup> Many political leaders of Dravidian Movement have set examples and changed their names. For example Nedunchelian, Mathialagan, Tamil Kudimagan. etc.

Another manifestation of Brahminism can be seen in the anti-Sanskrit movement. Since Sanskrit is associated with Aryanism and therefore held to be a symbol of Brahmin domination, Brahminical strategy used Sanskrit as a main tool of their social control says B.N. Nair who describes the Brahmin as the "cultural conqueror".<sup>36</sup> While the language of the *vedas* is rejected as a

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<sup>34</sup> Anaimuthu, V. , *Periyar E.V.R Chinthanaigal* (T), Vol.I, Tirchinapallai, 1974, p.21.

<sup>35</sup> *Manram*, Madras, 15 January 1955, p.18.

<sup>36</sup> Nair.B.N., *The Dynamic Brahmin*, Bombay, 1959 pp.78-79.

shameful reminder of ancient tutelage, the local language, Tamil is sought to be restored to its pre-Sanskrit status. The glorification of the regional language currently common in all the new linguistic states of India. Sanskrit is believed to be the restricted and sole vehicle of a Brahmin caste. It is been jealously preserved by them from the flake influences of non-Brahmin languages,<sup>37</sup> its degradation from its exalted status as a language of the gods and as cultural treasure of the Hindus has become necessary as an expression of anti-Brahminism. This is not an unprecedented phenomenon.

### **Periyar and Tamilians**

In a stormy party meeting in May 1920, J.N. Ramanathan who came from Madurai accused Thiyagaraja Chetti, the Justice Minister who failed to recognize the hard work and zeal of many Tamils in the party. The Tamilians have been noted for their hospitality and the Tamilians have contributed not a little to the strength of the party in power as is evident from the staunch support within the council and from the princely and loyal receptions accorded to the ministerial progress in the southern part of the Presidency, whereas the tours of the ministers have been marked by many herbals and hostilities in the northern parts. This clearly illustrates that the followers or admirers of Sanskrit have no sympathy with the non-Brahmin movement, whereas the movement is held dear by the Tamilians.<sup>38</sup>

Ramanathan warned Thiyagraja Chetti that if no Tamil Minister found a place in the next Justice Ministry in late 1923, the Tamilians in the Justice Party might break away from the party altogether. In August 1923, at

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, 28 May 1922.

Trichinapalli, a group of Tamil discontents in the party held a Tamilnadu non-Brahmin Conference, in defiance of the annual Justice Confederations held in December. The Rajah of Ramnad, one of the dissidents, told the audience that 'the Tamils with an ancient civilisation and a tradition of unexampled glory have now elected themselves into a conspicuous political party in order that their interests may be specially safeguarded and advanced.'<sup>39</sup>

At a peace committee meeting, Thyagaraja Chetti suggested that for the 1923 Justice Ministry of Reddi Naidu should step aside as Minister of Development to allow the appointment of a Tamilian, T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai, a Vellala from Tirunelveli district. It was accepted and harmony was restored. The Telugus then got their University with the help of the Tamils, in late 1925 and the establishment of a University for the "repaid development in the study of Telugu language and literature."<sup>40</sup> There was some opposition from the Telugu to the title Andhra University. Reddi Naidu contended that the bill should be called the Telugu University Bill. Both Andhra and Kingdom of the Andhras was, Aryan in origin and insisted that we Telugus have always been recognized as Dravidians and when asked this bill to be named after the Telugus, I appeal to my Dravidian friends, my Tamil friends, my Kanarese friends, my Malayalam friends, not to part with us as different from them."<sup>41</sup> Similar appeals to common Dravidian origins were made by others in the debate on the Andhra University in an attempt to prevent a party split between the Tamils and the Telugus, Natesa Mudaliar, who doubted the

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 August 1923.

<sup>40</sup> MLCP, XXIV 20 August 1925, p.366.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, XXV, 28 October 1928, p. 122.

wisdom of forming an Andhra University on the grounds that it might tend to divide the party, and appealed for unity Telugus can never be separated from the Tamils, he said. We are Dravidians and will not be separated". Ramaswami Mudaliar also pointed out that the Telugu University would be concerned with Dravidian culture in contradiction to Sanskritic studies. The attempt to establish a Dravidian identity provoked S. Satyamurti, of the Swaraj Party, to plead that the Council members ought to show by our votes that Brahmin-hatred must stop at the Staff Selection Board and must go no further.<sup>42</sup> Reddi Naidu's proposed amendment was rejected,<sup>43</sup> and the bill was passed by the Council on November 1925. The Andhra University after a great controversy with a Vice Chancellor came into existence in 1925.

Tamilians began to demand that a separate University be created in the heart of the Tamil country to serve the interests of Tamil culture, since Madras University, with its Sanskritic and Brahminical affiliations was unable to give Tamil-speaking people the right kind of cultural atmosphere and training. Their demand was supported by the Senate of the University of Madras, which passed a resolution recommending for the establishment of a university for each principal linguistic area within the Presidency. As a result of a discussion in the Council on March 22, 1926, a Tamil University Committee under the chairmanship of the Development Minister, T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai was constituted. P.J. Srinivasa Iyengar, a Tamil Vaishnava Brahmin scholar of considerable academic repute, suggested that there was

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

a good deal of popular demand for a Tamil University.<sup>44</sup> Another Tamil Professor, S. Somasundara Bharati, said that the mere fact that the Tamils see that the Andhras have achieved a university of their culture and language has whetted the desire of the Tamilians for a university.<sup>45</sup> The deciding factor was the receipt of a substantial endowment from Sir Annamalai Chetti, a member of the Nattukottai Chetti caste group for its donations to temples and other religious and educational establishments, both non-Brahmin and Brahmins. To satisfy the Tamils in 1929 a university, called Annamalai University, was founded at the temple centre of Chidambaram in South Arcot district. Under the terms of the grant, the university was to encourage both Tamil and Sanskrit.<sup>46</sup>

The passing of both the Madras University Reorganization Bill and the Andhra University Bill put great strains on Telugu – Tamil unity within the Justice Party. The problem had no doubt been aggravated by P. Tyagaraja Chetti with his failure to see the necessity of cultivating Tamil sympathies during the formation of the first Justice ministry. But its basic cause lay in the desire of each group to prevent the other from getting too large a share of the spoils, either in educational or in administrative spheres, and non-Brahmin demands, were often characterized by a type of competition along linguistic lines which could only be fomented over by appeals to a common Dravidian origin.

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<sup>44</sup> Madras Presidency, Report of the Tamil University Committee, 1927, Evidence, Part II (Madras, 1927), p. 123, New India, 10 May 1916.

<sup>45</sup> Report of the Tamil University Committee, p. 138.

<sup>46</sup> Annamalai University, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, 1929-54, Annamalainagar, 1955, pp. 146-148. One witness to the University Committee, Ramaswami Mudaliar, thought the University should be called Dravida University, Report of the Tamil University Committee, p. 40.

Justice Party's commitment to the encouragement of Tamil and Tamil studies took a number of different forms in the years that followed. One of its consistent demands was that Madras University, which began a research programme in Tamil in 1914, should give encouragement to Tamil by putting it on equal basis with other classical languages.<sup>47</sup> Thangavelu Pillai complained about the poor quality of Tamil instruction at Madras University in a speech in the Legislative Council and urged those who are put in charge of Tamil either should have taken the B.A. degree in Tamil or should be regular Tamil pandits.<sup>48</sup> When a proposal for a Tamil University was under consideration, M.S. Purnalingam Pillai, a noted Tamil scholar who was secretary of the Tamil University Committee, moved a resolution at a Justice Confederation in December, 1925, that the government should in the near future grant to the Tamil districts a university to encourage the "growth of the Tamil language", as well as the development of "historical consciousness among Tamilians."<sup>49</sup> T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai, Justice Minister of Development, frequently stressed the need for a Tamil University, which, as he pointed out, had been advocated for almost a decade.<sup>50</sup> He also objected that University of Madras was denial of Tamil and concentrating on Sanskrit, over which

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<sup>47</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 31 December 1919; *The Hindu*, Madras, 9 February 1925, and Varadharajula Naidu, *Justice Movement*, 1917, section II, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> MLCP, IV 20 January 1922, The Rajah of Ramnad (1889-1928) a Justice Party member, was like his father a patron of Tamil learning and was life president of the Madura Tamil Sangam, *The Hindu* 9 August 1928.

<sup>49</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, 21 December 1925.

<sup>50</sup> Letter of K.S. Sambasiva Aiyar, a Tamil Smartha Brahmin, to *New India*, 29 July 1916, in which he wrote that "it behoves the thinking spirits of Tamil –Aham (area inhabited by Tamils) to frame workable schemes for public discussion and adoption. The idea of a Tamil University is a glorious one and worthy of the best energies of every true Tamilian".

Brahmins held a virtual monopoly.<sup>51</sup> The sentiments of the Justice Party were reflected by V. Radhakrishnan, who wrote, “when a well-exploited language like Sanskrit is helped in such a bounteous way as the rewarding of rich scholarships and generous grants, surely Tamil, the language of the land, Tamil, the only hope for the reconstruction of South Indian History, deserves better treatment”. Sanskrit, he declared, “was a dead language, good only for keeping the Brahmins in the ascendant”.<sup>52</sup> In the Legislative Council, too, Justice Party members questioned whether the government should encourage Sanskrit colleges where the admissions were “restricted to particular castes.”<sup>53</sup>

On a broader level, many Justices condemned the Aryan Brahmins for having introduced into South India their *puranas*, their *Ramayana* and the *vedas* while they neglected indigenous Dravidian literature like the *Silappathikaram* and *Thirukkural* of Thiruvalluvar. One lecture, in Tamil on the “Deluge of the Dark Ages”, given at the Madura Tamil Sangam in 1921, stressed the damage inflicted by Brahmins on Tamil Literature. Tamil, the speaker said, was “the real language of the land”, and only the emancipation of the Tamil country from the Brahmins would bring true freedom.<sup>54</sup> Other speeches emphasized the polarity between north and south. Modern researches”, said one lecturer at a Tamil sangam meeting, “in the domains of archeology, ethnology, philosophy and anthropology have gone great ways

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<sup>51</sup> An address entitled Pazhanth Tamil, which was given at the third Tamil *Pandits* Conference in Tiruchinapalli on 11 April 1925, 1925. See also the report of the Conference in *The Hindu*, Madras 13 April 1925.

<sup>52</sup> *Madras Mail*, Madras, 2 April 1918, *New India*, 4 March 1918.

<sup>53</sup> MLCP, VII 23 March 1922, 3392-3393, 3385.

<sup>54</sup> See the printed text Madurai, 1921 p. 11.

to prove that the Tamilians had no sort of connection with the north or northern settlers, and they never derived their letters or arts or civilization from the Aryans.”<sup>55</sup>

After the First World War, greater freedom of speech was possible in the Presidency, the issue of speaking only in Tamil at political meetings in the Tamil area arose once more. At a Congress meeting on 23 August, 1919, S. Somasundara Bharati successfully got through a resolution declaring that all speeches at political meetings should be made in Tamil instead of in English.<sup>56</sup> This meant that at later meetings even Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer and V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, the Brahmins well known for their command over English were obligated to speak in Tamil.<sup>57</sup> In 1921, when all four Dravidian language areas at last had separate Congress organizational units, it was stipulated that all proceedings, accounts, and transactions were to be carried out not in English but in the language of the circle that is, in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, or Malayalam.

Implicit in all these activities, the Brahmins as Aryans from the north had no role in the creation or maintenance of Dravidian culture. If some Tamil Brahmins, long renowned for their Sanskrit learning, reacted to the threat of Dravidianism by seeking to emphasize their connection with Tamil and with the Tamil region and all represented it was a losing battle. Other deeper and more elemental forces were at work which assisted in giving

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<sup>55</sup> Devasikhamani, S.K., *The Tamils and Their Language*, Tiruchinapalli, 1919, p.10. The lecture was given on 25 November 1918.

<sup>56</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, 25 August 1919

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 24, June 1920. On one occasion Srinivasa Sastri was to give a speech in Madras in English, but when he began a voice from the end of the hall called out, “Mr. Sastrigal must speak in Tamil”.

currency to the belief that Tamil was the sole possession of the non-Brahmins. By law, Brahmins were to lose their positions as administrators and government servants. Their hold on the educational institutions, particularly Madras University, was broken. And as politicians, their position was challenged both by the Justice Party and by Congress. It was the non-Brahmin threat to their economic welfare and security that posed the greatest immediate problem and the only solution was to redirect Brahmin skills and capacities into trade and industry in Tamilnadu and in the urban areas of North India. Non-Brahmin success was to have more significant long-term effects for South India, for the Dravidianists realised that in the Brahmins they had good whipping boys, and as a result the forces for Tamil separatism became involved in a series of battles which helped to perpetuate social conflict in South India, and particularly in the Tamil area.

The year 1925 was an important watershed in the politics of the Tamil-speaking area of Madras. In April 1925 the death of Tyagaraja Chetti forced the Justice Party once again to cast about for new resources of leadership, support, policy and organization. In November 1925, Periyar's exit from the Tamilnadu Congress after the conference at *Kanchipuram* made it possible for him to strike out on his own and in so doing to influence the transitional position of the Justice Party. For Congress as well, this year was important in that it brought into local and national prominence S. Srinivasa Iyengar, who was able to organize Swaraj forces in Madras to considerable electoral advantage.

The development of Tamil and national politics in the years immediately following 1925 indicated the re-emergence of a series of Congress policies enabled the Congress to emerge in the first concerted all India Non Co-operation Movement, gradually drawing Tamils into national politics. Also, Ramaswami Naicker, taking advantage of prevailing Dravidianist theories and the decay of the Justice Party, employed his own remarkable agitation skills to mobilize the loyalties of Tamilians for a Tamil State.

### **Periyar and Tamil**

The alphabets in Tamil language have not been undergone any change from time immemorial. However, in other languages certain changes have been effected from time to time regarding pronunciation, shape, deleting unnecessary words as well as substituting new words from other languages. It is quite common that such changes are felt necessary and they automatically change due to compulsion or for civilization. Words have been made in order to express the meaning of thinking, likewise alphabets are brought into existence to express the sound etc.<sup>58</sup> “Language is nothing but like a war weapon in the world level agitation and hence certain changes must have been found in our language now and then.”<sup>59</sup> As the changes in war instruments according to the time and nature, our language should also undergo certain changes now and then. Periyar thought that such language and its letters change are absolutely necessary, so that Tamil shall be studied easily by non-Tamilians, and easy for Tamil typing and in course of

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<sup>58</sup> *Pakuttarivu*, Madras, 30 December 1934.

<sup>59</sup> Anaimuthu, V., *Periyar EVR Chinthanaigal*, (T) Vol.II, Tiruchinapalli, 1974, p.973.

time, Tamil would become the ruling language of Madras State . For all these purposes, Periyar took efforts during his life time.

At present, there are a number of different alphabets to be remembered in Tamil. Among the total number of 247 alphabets, 135 alphabets are in different shape and type and they are kept to be remembered in mind.<sup>60</sup> Unlike other foreign languages, certain fixed rules have been followed and adopted for studying Tamil and therefore it is very difficult to study the Tamil alphabets. In English language, the vowels are five and the consonants are two and thus the total number of alphabets in English is only twenty six . They are all separate alphabets and not mixed either with vowels or consonants. Hence it is easy to learn and study. Further in Tamil language, the grammar and pronunciation are held under certain rules and regulations. Therefore, Periyar seriously thought of bringing out some modification in the mode of writing the alphabets of Tamil language.<sup>61</sup>

Among the vowels in Tamil language, the alphabets ஐ and ஔ are not much needed. If these letters are to be reduced, it is much convenient for pronunciation as well as easy to write in Tamil. These changes will in no way affect the grammar of the language. Periyar had seen a book of Thirukkural not using these vowels and other consonants even some forty years ago.<sup>62</sup> If we do like this thirty eight alphabets of Tamil can be reduced according to Periyar. Further he pointed out that instead of writing 'ஐ' and 'ஔ' one can

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<sup>60</sup> Nannan,M., *Periyarial -Mozhi*, Chennai, 1993, p.108.

<sup>61</sup> Periyar.E.V.Ramasami, *Ezhuthu Chirthirultam* Chennai, 1978, p.25.

<sup>62</sup> Anaimuthu,V., *Periyar EVR Chinthanaigal*, (T) Vol.II, Tiruchinapalli, 1974, p.974.

write அய் and அவ் Moreover he suggested that the alphabets னூ ற னூ may be written or changed as ணா, றா, னா.

Periyar had his own ideas and calculations for reducing the number of alphabets in Tamil. He is of the opinion that by introducing new type of identity marks such as ஈ, ஞ, டீ etc, the number of letters of Tamil language may be reduced to thirty eight. He also writes that the three alphabets by name ந, ங, ஞ can be changed as ன் +த=ந, ன் +க=ங, ன் +ச=ஞ. According to him, these three letters produce the same sound and hence these three alphabets may better be avoided.<sup>63</sup> His sole aim was to reduce the number of Tamil alphabets, so that small children can easily write, learn and understand mother tongue. He also emphasised that by doing these minor changes the language Tamil may not be affected in any way.

Periyar wished to have renaissance in Tamil not far anything expect to make the language to be made simple, concise and clear.<sup>64</sup> He made mention in his journal *Pagutharivu* that the Tamilians would get lot of benefits when they adopt these changes.<sup>65</sup>

Periyar never attempted to make marvelous changes in Tamil within a day or two. He tried his level best to get the consent of great scholars of Tamil regarding certain changes of the language. He convinced them by his argument and his first and foremost disciple Thiru. Kurusamy brought a resolution regarding changes in Tamil in the conference held in Thuraiyoor in August 1932. However, the resolution was rejected by the President of the

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<sup>63</sup> Sundaravadivelu, N.T., *Puratchiyalar Periyar*, Chennai, 1978, p.216.

<sup>64</sup> Anamuthu, V., *Op.cit.*, p.960.

<sup>65</sup> Rajendran, S., *Tamil Kavithaikalil Dravida Iyakkathin Thakkam*, Chennai, 1985, p.99; *Pagutharivu*, Madras, 30 December 1934.

Tamil Conference.<sup>66</sup> The conference of the Tamil Nanbar was held in December 1933. A resolution in the conference regarding the renaissance of Tamil, especially the Tamil alphabets, was submitted by K.M.Balasubramaniam, Salem R.Natesan, S.Kurusamy, Puvaloor. A.Ponnambalam and Sattankulam A.Ragavan. This resolution was taken up for discussion.<sup>67</sup>

After waiting for nearly one year, on 1 January 1935 Periyar again had made certain changes on a few Tamil alphabets. He said instead of writing **ண, ன, ற**, it was better to write them as 'ணா, னா, றா'. "Likewise the alphabets such as **~ண, ~ன, ~ல, ~ள** " would be written as "**ணை, னை, லை, ளை** " and the letters like "**ணெ, னெ, றெ**" would be changed as "**ணோ, னோ, றோ**" etc. This way of writing Tamil alphabets was adopted by Periyar in his Tamil journals *Kudi Arasu*, *Puratchi*, *Pagutharivu* and *Viduthalai* right from the year 1935.<sup>68</sup> A book titled *Mozhi Ezhuthu* "Language words" was also published by him in the year 1948.<sup>69</sup>

### **Government's Support**

A committee was formed in order to discuss and make changes in Tamil when Omenthur Ramasami was the Chief Minister and D.S.Avinasilingam was the Education Minister of Madras. Dr.T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram, Dr.M.Varadarjan and Kalki Krishna Moorthi were appointed as members in the committee. This committee recommended the

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<sup>66</sup> Sundaravadelu, N.T., *op.cit.*, p.217.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Vanagamudi, K., *Puratchi Petchalar Periyar*, Chennai, 1989, p.259.

<sup>69</sup> Jeri, *Manitham: Thantai E.Ve.Ra.Periyarin Matha Ethirppu Nilaippadu-Oru Arasial Cheyalpadu*, (T), Chennai, 1994, p.87.

views of Periyar to the government.<sup>70</sup> Accepting these recommendations and to implement them during this time a number of organisations were established for the growth and development of Tamil language. The most important among them are *Ulaga Tamil Arachi Niruvanam* (World Tamil Research Organisation) '*Chorpirappu Agara Muthali Thitta Iyakkam*', *Tamil Valarchi Iyakkam*', *Thirukkural Aaivu Maiyam*' *Kural Neri Parappu Maiyam*', '*Tamilnatu Pada Nool Niruvanam*,' *Then Mozhi Puttaga Trust*,' *Iyal, Esai, Nadaga Mantram and Thol Porul Arachithurai*.<sup>71</sup>

In 1956, the Government of Tamilnadu declared Tamil as an official language. A special regulation was enacted by the government to enhance the status of Tamil. A committee named *Atchi Mozhi Kuzhu* was formed in the year 1957, to implement the Tamil language in all the fields. In order to help this committee, another organisation, namely, *Tamil Valarchi Aarachi Manram* was formed in 1959. The entire work connected with the growth and development of Tamil was given in charge of this Manram. '*Tamil Valarchi Iyakkam* flourished in much strength to consolidate. The Government of Tamilnadu passed an Act on 18.12.1982 to make use of Tamil in District and High Courts and Government orders would be promulgated only in Tamil.<sup>72</sup> Later on, a circular was issued to all government officials to put even their signature only in Tamil. The government further ordered to use only Tamil in name-boards kept in the shops, stores and other public places. All these

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<sup>70</sup> Sundaravadivelu, N.T., *op.cit.*, p.217.

<sup>71</sup> Pon kothandaraman, *Tamil Oanarchi, Tamil Valarchi, Tamil Atchi, (T)*, Chennai, 1986, p.69.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*; p.70.

measures of the government indirectly helped the spread of Tamil in every nook and corner of Tamilnadu.

Soon after M.G.Ramachandran became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu in 1978, the Golden Jubilee of Periyar was celebrated in Tamilnadu throughout a year. A committee under the leadership of Dr.V.R.Nedunchezian was constituted, which recommended all the views of Periyar on the changes and modification of Tamil alphabets. According to the recommendation, an Act was passed in the Tamilnadu Assembly in 1978.<sup>73</sup> Thereafter the changes in Tamil language alphabets were followed by Tamilnadu government as well as the private press also.

Words are inadequate to praise the contribution of Periyar for the growth, development and spread of Tamil language. He utilised his daily newspapers and journals for the development of Tamil. For even dates and year in these publications were printed in Tamil.<sup>74</sup> According to Periyar, the medium of instruction in schools and colleges would be in Tamil. The view of Periyar is that education may not be a burden to the students or to the educated mass and they should easily remember and learn Tamil. He emphasized that Tamil typing would be made easy when the alphabets are minimized. He further stressed that when numbers of alphabets are reduced in Tamil, the number of pages of book may also be minimised and the cost of books would become less. These revolutionary ideas of Periyar were considered not only language reforms but also a social reform.<sup>75</sup> His untiring

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<sup>73</sup> G. O. No.449, Public Department, 19 October 1978.

<sup>74</sup> Anaimuthu,V.,*Periyar.E.V.R. Chithanaigal* (T), Vol.II. Thiruchirapalli, 1974, p.986.

<sup>75</sup> Rajendran.J., *op.cit*, p.100.

works for the uplift of the Tamil and Tamils are highly remarkable and praiseworthy. However, Periyar considered that as thondu (service).

Periyar, in accordance with his principle that it need not be accompanied with replacement, did not look for any sacred book of the Hindus to be elevated as holy. However, the Tamilising trend that the Periyar Movement kindled had found a text in *Thirukkural* for secular guidance and spiritual fulfillment. However, he did not cultivate any blind faith in *Thirukkural*. His assessment of *Thirukkural* as an acceptable one, and rational guide for conduct is evidence of his consistency in his thought. He was not prepared to accept *Thirukkural* fully but found it acceptable in a large measure and considered it as a great treasure for Tamilians.

### **His Assessment of Thirukkural**

Initially, Periyar condemned *Thirukkural* as inconsistent with rationalism but later modified his stand. He admitted that for all his policies, programmes and ideals, he was not holding *Thirukkural* as the basis but he considered it as an authority and a literature that could provide the basis to his policies and opinions. *Thirukkural*, according to him, is an important guide in many fields and contains principles of high conduct necessary for a good life and a code of conduct for social development and relationships.<sup>76</sup>

Periyar expressed his deep attachment to *Thirukkural* based on his understanding and realisation of its greatness. Yet he did not subscribe to the view that *Thirukkural* preached as philosophy that was ultimate or eternal truth as some religious people held the vedas. He considered that in

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<sup>76</sup> Tantai Periyar, *Tirukkuralum Dravidar Kazhagamum*, p.20

*Thirukkural* justices make relevant for current ideas and accepted it broadly as a suitable text as it preached a philosophy contradictory to Aryan *Dharma*, contradictory to *manudharma* and therefore highly acceptable for Tamilians.<sup>77</sup>

Compared to many other texts, to Periyar *Thirukkural* is a rationalistic literature for having no reference to themes such as God, *varna*, *jati*, fate or previous birth. Even in *Tholkappium*, the earlier Tamil grammatical work of Tamilnadu, it is said there was no mention of God. So, Periyar felt that the Movement in its endeavour to establish a society devoid of caste divisions, priestly dominance and inequalities could find a base for its action in *Thirukkural*. Since *Thirukkural* refers to code of conduct, justice and righteousness and not to religion, gods and rituals, Periyar accepted it as a pure Tamilian literature.<sup>78</sup>

### **Thirukkural – a text preaching good conduct**

Periyar's opinion positively changed in favour of *Thirukkural* on the explanations of scholars that *Thirukkural* had been misinterpreted. He began to preach that *Thirukkural* has to be properly interpreted. According to him, when *Thirukkural* appeared, Aryan religion, *shastras* and *puranas* had intruded so deep into the Dravidian society that people had fallen a prey to their teachings. That is the reason behind the question posed by Thiruvalluvar, the exponent of *Thirukkural*, who was a Brahmin? and the reply that kindness to all living beings and selfless service to others was the quality, if one is a true Brahmin. He accepted *Thirukkural*'s criticism of gods,

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Tantai Periyar, *Thirukkuralum Dravidar Kazhagamum, op.cit.*, p. 7

vedas, festivals, etc.<sup>79</sup> He identified the basic philosophy of *Thirukkural* as rejection of Aryan *manudharma*. He said that *Thirukkural* was written to reject and end Aryan theories and to turn people's attention away from Aryan teachings.<sup>80</sup>

Periyar regarded *Thirukkural* as a text preaching good conduct suitable for the contemporary world, contrasting this with the Aryan puranas, which he always had as texts preaching immoral conduct. Since the references to God in *Thirukkural* did not indicate the concept of image worship, they were regarded as non-Aryan.<sup>81</sup> He made a comparison of teachings of *Thirukkural* and *Manudharmashastra* to show the superiority of the former in preaching good conduct.<sup>82</sup> Periyar was of the view that *Thiruvalluvar* spoke of *dharma*, *attma* and *karma*, and that the *veedu* believed to be equivalent to *moksha* was not really so.

### **Thirukkural a literature of rationalism**

*Thirukkural* preached no blind faith which is taken to be its greatness and to be venerated as literature of rationalism. With the elevation of the *Thirukkural* as the only text worthy enough to follow, Periyar turned his campaign for the benefit of *Thirukkural* and its acceptance. If *Thirukkural* is made a compulsory lesson in schools, there would be no Brahminism. It is far better to become a learned person by reading a three anna *Thirukkural* rather than being a fort by reading textbooks costing hundreds of rupees. Magistrates, sub-inspectors and Judges should take *Thirukkural* as their

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Tantai Periyar, *Thirukkuralum, Manudharmum*, p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> *Vidutalai*, Madras, 30 May 1950.

<sup>82</sup> Tantai Periyar, *Thirukkuralum Periyarum*, pp. 17 – 18

guide book; questions from *Thirukkural* should be asked in examination for recruitment to services, observed Periyar, in the course of the Thirukkural campaign that gained vigor in Tamilnadu.<sup>83</sup>

Periyar considered *Thiruvalluvar* as a socialist preacher with a good deal of socialist ideals.<sup>84</sup> However, he did not hold *Thirukkural* as the ultimate authority or based his Self-Respect philosophy on its teaching. He cited *Thirukkural* to the extent that he found support; for his ideas and not for constructing his ideals on that base. He cautioned his followers to be selective in their acceptance of Thirukkural, and to take what was consistent with their ideologies and repeat the rest.<sup>85</sup>

### **Tamil Isai Sangam**

The Periyar Movement was accompanied by a renaissance in Tamil culture and arts. To give prominent place for Tamil songs in classical music the *Tamil Isai Sangam* 'Tamil Music Association' was established in 1940.<sup>86</sup> Along with this, music was no longer considered a medium only to promote *bhakti* worship, but was more and more used as an instrument to promote modern secular ideas, an item that had long been in the agenda of the Self Respect Movement.<sup>87</sup> The pure Tamil word *vanakkam* came to replace the Sanskrit *namaskaran*.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32 – 33

<sup>84</sup> Periyar cited that a Thirukkural says that if any one had to beg for his living, the God who created him should be banished.

<sup>85</sup> Anaimuthu, V., *Periyar EVR Chintanaigal (T)*, Vol. II, p. 1260.

<sup>86</sup> Saraswathi, S., *The Teachings of Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy*, Madras, 1994, p.97.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

## Tamil translation of pamphlets

The Periyar Movement has brought out a number of Tamil translations of pamphlets on religion, spirituality and superstition by confirmed atheists of the west and has been reprinting them several times. Among these are Robert G. Ingersolls<sup>88</sup> What is religion? Two ways “Irandu valigal” describes the natural and the spiritual methods and his essay on ‘Ghosts and Spirits’ and Father Jean Mesliers Will (Marana Vakkumoolam) on ‘Rationalism’.<sup>89</sup>

Periyar’s views on Language.

One of the most progressive ideas of Periyar was related to the question of the medium of instruction and administration. He was the leader behind the massive anti-Hindi agitation that shocked the Madras Government in 1938 and gave rise to demand Tamilnadu for Tamilians.<sup>90</sup> But he was far from being a Tamil fanatic and in fact came into conflict with almost all political parties at some point. He was critical of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam’s agitational approach, the Tamil Arasu Kazhagam’s Tamil fanaticism and the Swatantra Party’s dual policy of supporting Hindi in the North and English in the South. Agitation in the matter of language appeared to him a device for self -promotion of the agitators.

Periyar regarded the concept of mother tongue itself as false. He thought that like caste and religion, mother tongue was a notion<sup>91</sup>, an artificial sentiment liable to change according to the surrounding. If a person likes a

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) was a politician and orator who popularised the higher criticism of the Bible in a humanistic philosophy, and scientific rationalism. He came to be known as the ‘great agnostic’.

<sup>89</sup> Saraswathi, S., *op.cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Periyar EVR, *Arivu Virundu (T)*, p. 33.

Hindu boy practically becoming a Muslim or Christian by being brought up by a Muslim or Christian or acquiring French as the mother tongue if brought up by a French. He was of the view that feelings of caste, religion or language were not natural or inborn but artificial and acquired according to time, place and environment and would change like food habits and like master servant or husband wife relationships.<sup>92</sup> Periyar himself was a Canerese by birth and spoke Canarese at home but adopted Tamil as his language, conducted his public transactions in Tamil, and devoted his entire life for the cause of Tamilian uplift.

Periyar's progressive outlook and ambition to develop the society on modern lines began to grow with the linguistic reorganisation of states and gained momentum after the electoral victory of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1967. He sarcastically remarked that in twenty years of freedom, the people had learnt to say that they did not want English but wanted Tamil. He considered this as 'madness' and observed that even if one could scan through the entire Tamil literature with a microscope, one could not find any idea conducive to rationality, life education and development of knowledge in pure Tamil.<sup>93</sup> On the contrary, he pointed out that several irrational concepts and teachings revolting to human dignity and Self-Respect were preserved in Tamil literature. In defence of his thesis, Periyar had been often referring to *Silappadikaram* and *Kamaba Ramayanam*. He considered the former as a treasure of superstitions, a legend preaching *pen adimai* (slavery of women) which was a concept that

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

the Periyar Movement was fighting. Kannaki was the wife of Kovalan, who was punished by the king of Madurai with death sentence on a false charge of stealing the anklets of the queen. Kannaki proved her husband's innocence and her anger at the miscarriage of justice at the hands of the king and caused the burning of Madurai city. A statue of Kannaki was installed in Madras city in connection with the first World Tamil Conference in 1968. *Kamba Ramayana*, according to Periyar is a storehouse of falsehood. He further said that the medical literature in Tamil was erected for the prosperity of the doctors and not for curing the patients; the astronomical literature contained only religious, and mythological absurdities introduced for the sake of astrologers, in the industrial field Tamil had invented only backward implements like the grinding stone, oil lamp, palm leaf, cotton wick, bullock cart, etc., the scientific literature spoke of chanting mantras, divine power, yogic power, and other such barbarian ideas with no practical utility. He observed that Tamils had no measure of time and this was borrowed from the English. He confessed that he was ashamed to talk of the quality of Tamil literature for fear that Brahmins would laugh.<sup>94</sup> His object was to arrest the Tamilising process so as to divert attention to more useful pursuits towards a scientific progress.<sup>95</sup>

Periyar was quite harsh in his criticism of Tamil scholars working for Tamil politics when he observed that the Tamil *pandits* deserved to be punished in a graded manner up to life imprisonment and hanging.<sup>96</sup> The

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30 – 32.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Viduthalai*, Madras, 16 March 1967.

substance of his message was, in this country, there has been no contribution from any poets for progress or development work for human society. All poets preached the ancient glory. Nobody has created any progressive literature. Even modern critics have no dharma. *Kamba Ramayanam* and *Chilappadikaram* are useful only for betrayal of Tamil race, for mentoring foolishness, superstition and blocking nationalism. If these two literary works are popular, it only means that the people of this land have no intelligence, Self-Respect or racial feeling. Periyar referred to literature like *Tevaram*, *Tiruvagasam*, *Tirumarai*, *Prabhandam* and *Periapuranam* as 'rubbish' which are doing immense harm to Tamils. They were considered anti Self-Respect literature.

Periyar advised that the use of Tamil language should be restricted to ordinary conversation, letter writing, administration and religion and beyond these, it should have no place. "Tamil is a barbarian language", he said not once but several times meaning that it would not lead to progress in the modern, scientific world and in the age of reason. His dialogue was with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leaders who were rather enthusiastic in switching over to Tamil in administration as well as education. Periyar directly addressed the Chief Minister, M. Karunanithi, that it was of no use to threaten to resign on the Tamil issue and reminded his followers that he always had such views about Tamil ever since the beginning of anti-Hindi demonstration. He quoted an old song, the meaning of which was that Tamil was not useful even for begging and one could not make a living by a

knowledge of Tamil alone. Tamil should be more usefully spent on some other objects.<sup>97</sup>

In an editorial article in *Viduthalai*, Periyar strongly criticized the Tamil language 'Tamil as a *Kattumirandi Mozhi*' barbarian language, Throughout October and November 1967 Periyar wrote several articles depicting that Tamils were backward and irrational, that Tamils had no Self-Respect, no nationalism and no racial feeling and no humaneness.<sup>98</sup>

He elaborated the idea in a speech at Pachiappa's College, Madras. The substance of the speech is that Language is an instrument to explain an idea and it is not possible for men to progress through a language. Nobody has become rational by learning Tamil. Maraimalai Adigal has agreed that there is no informative literature in Tamil. *Thirukkural* is not totally faultless, Tamil is spoilt by the introduction of religion.<sup>99</sup>

Periyar's independent thinking, free from political and social pressures could be seen in his vehement propaganda in favour of learning English at a time when in protest against the Hindi policy of the Union Government, there was a swing towards Tamil. He first raised a question, why English, an international language prevalent in India also was not included as a national language when even Sanskrit was included.<sup>100</sup> He wanted to retain English in order to promote the capacity to think<sup>101</sup> and to stop harping on the past glory of Tamils when people should move fast with changing times.<sup>102</sup> At a

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 October 1967.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 October 1967.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 October 1967.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 March 1959.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 October 1967.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 December 1967.

point Periyar even said that Tamil should be discarded even at home and English should be introduced. He described the erasing of English name boards as 'butchery'. The World Tamil Conference was described as a census to enumerate fools.

Periyar was a radical humanist and one of the most outspoken critics of modern India who consistently for over sixty years applied his mind for building a new social order. His concentration was simultaneously on educating the vast majority of masses and compelling the political and administrative mechanism to help and build a new order based on the value of Self- Respect. The devotion with which he dedicated his life for spreading these ideologies of rationalist thinking and the lasting achievements, he earned in infusing a new spirit in the society in which he worked to elevate himself as one of the builders of modern Tamil society.