CHAPTER I

THE TAMILNADU CONGRESS BEFORE 1939

The analysis of the Congress party’s activities in the Madras Presidency cannot be studied in isolation as the Congress party of Tamilnadu (TNCC) was part of the Indian National Congress (INC). The decisions of the INC influenced the regional politics. In fact, the factional conflicts in the Madras Presidency originated from the INC. A study of the conflicts at the all India level therefore becomes necessary and relevant.

The Freedom War took a new turn in 1919 to which many factors contributed. The introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, Khilafat movement, and the proposed enactment of the certain repressive laws were the most prominent of them. The annual conference of the Congress was held at Amritsar in December, 1919.¹ Just at that time the Crown gave assent to the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of reforms. The scheme of reforms became the main subject of discussion and the issue centred around the attitude INC must adopt whether to

accept the new proposals or to obstruct their implementation in the country. Gandhi thought that the Congress should adopt a resolution accepting the reforms. On the other hand B.G. Tilak, C.R. Das and Bepin Chandra Pal considered the reforms wholly insufficient and unsatisfactory and therefore favoured its rejection. Finally a compromise was struck. While the Congress thanked the British for the reforms, it declared that 'self-rule' was the 'ultimate goal' of the Indian people, and that they would 'so work the reforms as to secure an early establishment of full responsible government'.

But after the Amritsar Congress the attitude of the Congress leaders towards the Reforms completely changed because of certain grave issues like the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire and publication of the Hunter Committee Report. Gandhi favoured Non-Co-operation and Chitranjan Das became a champion of the Council-Entry in the Special Congress Session held at Calcutta in September 1920. The Non-Co-operation plan provided that 'instead of not entering into the Legislatures the Congress should get into these bodies in large numbers and carry on a policy of uniform, 

2 B. Pattabhi Sitramayya, op. cit., p.304.
continuous and consistent opposition to the Government'. After Gandhi's announcement of the Non-Co-operation, the whole controversy centred around it. Tilak died on the very day Gandhi wanted to launch his programme. Though C.R. Das and other Nationalists opposed the Non-Co-operation Movement it was finally decided at the Special Calcutta Congress Session in 1920 in favour of Gandhi. At the 1920 Nagpur Congress Session, Gandhi's programme of Non-Co-operation was finally accepted.

Since the national movement received a set back after 1921 due to several reasons, the demand for a partial revival of the old responsive cooperation in a different name was made at the initiative of C.R. Das. Those who demanded a change were called the 'Pro-Changers' and those who expressed their allegiance to Gandhi were called, the 'No-Changers'. The former pleaded that the policy of Non-Co-operation should be extended to the Legislative Councils and from within the Councils the Congress should implement its policy of Non-Co-operation.

The annual session of the Congress held at Gaya in December, 1922, became almost a battle ground between the advocates and the opponents of Council-Entry. The Session was a victory for the 'No-Changers' and a disappointment for the advocates of Council-Entry. After this defeat, the Congress President Das formed a new party, the 'Swarajya Party' to contest in the forthcoming elections. Moti Lal and Das left Gaya with a sense of defeat but they declared that outside the Councils they would cooperate with the constructive programme of the Congress and would work under the leadership of Gandhi. A Special Congress session was held at Delhi in September, 1923 where it was agreed that those who had no religious or other conscientious objections to entering legislatures were allowed to contest elections and still remain within the Congress. Thus the ideological rift was patched up in the AICC.

In May, 1924 Gandhi issued a statement expressing his fundamental difference with the Swarajists that Council-Entry was inconsistent with


5 Jawaharlal Nehru, 'An Autobiography', 1962, p.185; The Mail, 17 September, 1923. Before this at Allahabad and Bombay AICC Meetings Nehru and Azad succeeded in bringing about a truce between the two groups.
Non-Co-operation. He, however, granted full liberty to the Swarajists to pursue their programme in the Councils, unfettered by any obstruction from the 'No-Changers'. Shortly after, Gandhi agreed to the Swarajist Party working within the Councils. This agreement was endorsed by the 39th Session of the Congress at Belgaum in December, 1924. After Das's death in 1925, Gandhi got himself further reconciled with the Swarajist activities in the Councils, and endorsed them as the activities of the Congress Party itself. This stand was finally ratified by the Kanpur Session of the Congress in December, 1925. Thus the long-drawn tussle between the 'No Changers', and the 'Pro-Changers' came to an end.

These ideological rifts and the developments in the INC had its repercussions in the Madras Presidency and created a wedge among the Congress leaders in the region. At the meeting of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee (MPCC) held in June 1920 at Tirunelveli, Rajaji successfully managed to have a

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7 Ibid.

8 B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., p.486-489.
resolution on Non-Co-operation, passed though S. Kasthuri Ranga Iyenger, the President of the MPCC and S. Satyamurthi, Secretary were opposed to it. In the MPCC out of 306 delegates from Tamilnadu 161 supported Rajaji's resolution. This was considered as a 'no-confidence' motion on the President and Secretary and therefore Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar and Satyamurthi relinquished their offices. They charged Rajaji with promoting factionalism within the MPCC. Inevitably the rift between Rajaji and Kasturi Ranga Iyenger widened. It resulted in a power struggle and personality clash within the party.

In the MPCC, while Rajaji remained the chief exponent of Gandhi's philosophy of Non-Co-operation, Kasturi Ranga Iyenger, Srinivasa Iyengar and Satyamurthi stood for Council-Entry. They voted against the boycott resolution at the Calcutta Congress Session in September, 1920. Srinivasa Iyengar contested the Madras University seat, contending that the resolution passed at the Calcutta AICC was not binding on him as he had voted against it. Thus two opposite camps developed.

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The members of the MPCC were divided among themselves on the issue of Council-Entry irrespective of their caste and regional affiliations. Srinivasa Iyenger and Rajaji headed the respective camps. The non-Brahmins in the MPCC worked amicably under the Brahmin leadership in both these groups. Non-Brahmin leaders like E.V. Ramasami., V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Varadarajulu Naidu, T.V. Gopalasami Mudaliar, Thiru Vi. Ka., Dhandapani Pillai, Athinarayana Chettiar and others were opposed to Council-Entry and agreed to the Gandhian idea of Non-Co-operation. Among the non-Brahmins Kesava Pillai, R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar, V. Sarkarai Chettiar and Subbaroyan were opposed to Non-Co-operation. Among the Brahmins, V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, P.S. Sivasamy Iyer, V.S. Srinivasan Sastri, C.P. Ramasamy Iyer and others supported the Council-Entry programme. Thus it can be seen that in the first phase the Congress members were divided on ideological lines and not on the basis of casteism.

After the Nagpur Congress, a Special Congress Session was held at Delhi in September 1923 in which


12 *Swadesamitran*, 16 October, 1920.
the Swarajists (the Pro-Changers) scored a decisive victory over the 'No-Changers'. At the AICC meeting of Ahmedabad in 1924 Gandhi moved four resolutions. The Swarajists opposed his first resolution and left the meeting in protest. The first resolution was about Yarn Franchise. The Swarajists opposed it on the ground that it was intended to get rid of them from the Congress. Gandhi however did not yield and put it for voting. Out of the 104 members participated 67 voted in favour and 37 voted against his resolution. Gandhi realised the fact that had the Swarajists remained in the house and participated in the voting, he would have lost the resolution. He toned down the original resolutions. Gandhi, who was earlier quite stubborn later became very conciliatory and more lenient towards the Swarajists. After the death of C.R. Das, Gandhi further reconciled with the Swarajists.

1925-1938

The Congress finally adopted the Swarajya Party's Council Entry Programme as its own at the Kanpur Congress in December 1925 and contested the elections.

The Congress however, put a time limit, for its demand of full responsible Government. It decided that if by February 1926, the Government failed to respond
to their demands the Congress would revise its stand and decide on its future course of action.\textsuperscript{13} As there was no response from the Government, the Congress in March 1926, requested all its members in the Legislatures to boycott the Legislatures.\textsuperscript{14}

In the elections to the Madras Legislature in 1926, the Congress secured 46 out of 104 elected seats.\textsuperscript{15} The leader of the Madras Legislature Congress Party (MLCP), C.V. Narasimha Raju informed the Governor that his party would not accept office,\textsuperscript{16} as a result of which there arose a stalemate and a constitutional crisis. The stalemate came to an end with the nomination of Dr.P. Subbaroyan, an independent by the Governor to form an Independent Ministry.\textsuperscript{17} Before Subbaroyan was nominated by the Governor a section of the Congress in Madras pleaded that the Congress should

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, \textit{op. cit.}, p.494-496.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p.506.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p.530.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Mail}, 25 November, 1926.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Indian Annual Register}, Ed. by H.N. Mitra, Calcutta, 1927, Vol.1, p.50.
\end{itemize}
help others in forming a Ministry. Curiously this section was headed by Rajaji. The support to Dr. Subbaroyan had also resulted in a clash between the factions headed by Rajaji and Srinivasa Iyengar.

The Congress Party organised a public meeting at Madras on 18 November, 1926 to celebrate its electoral victory. In that meeting Srinivasa Iyengar, (who, by then had become the President of the AICC because of Moti Lal Nehru’s departure to England) and Satyamurthi participated. Here, Rajaji stated that if the non-Brahmins declared that they did not want a communal party, (indicating Subbaroyan’s support), let them choose their leaders for which the Governor might give his consent as well as the Congress. This idea was definitely against the Congress creed and hence Srinivasa Iyengar stated that the views expressed by Rajaji were his personal views. Satyamurthi also stated that he did not agree with Rajaji and that their future task was to 'defeat the bureaucracy'. This enthronement of Subbaroyan and the support of Rajaji in his favour had some important dimensions for the relationship between Rajaji and Subbaroyan in 1940s.

18 The Mail, 20 November, 1926.
Srinivasa Iyengar gave the impression to the Governor that Subbaroyan would have the support of the Congress party. This was contrary to the spirit of the Gauhati Congress of 1926 where the issue of office acceptance was discussed. Except Rajaji all the prominent leaders of the Tamilnadu region including Srinivasa Iyengar had participated in the Gauhati Congress wherein the resolution that they should not accept office or help others getting into office was accepted.

On return from Gauhati, the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) directed its members in the Madras Legislature to vote against the Budget in order to defeat the Subbaroyan Ministry, as the APCC members were part of the Madras Legislature Congress party. But the MLCP members of Tamil Nadu defied the Party mandate and voted in support of the Subbaroyan Ministry. The Gauhati Congress resolution was thus


20 '... refuse to accept Ministerships or other offices in the Government and oppose the formation of a Ministry by other parties, until in the opinion of the Congress or the AICC., a satisfactory response is made by the Government to the National Demand.'- B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., pp.516-517; Indian Annual Register, 1927, Vol. I, pp. 389-398.

flouted at Madras. The APCC headed by Prakasam decided to move a resolution in the forthcoming Bombay Session of the Congress censuring the MLCP for defying the Gauhati resolution.\textsuperscript{22}

Prakasam first moved a resolution in the Congress Working Committee meeting at Bombay in 1927 which was rejected by the Congress Working Committee (CWC). Then in the AICC, Gopala Menon of the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) moved a resolution condemning the behaviour of the MLCP. This was seconded by A. Govindachari of the APCC.\textsuperscript{23} When the resolution was discussed, the Leader and the Deputy Leader of the MLCP justified their stand that the accession to power by the Justice Party would have been more harmful to the national cause, and hence their support to Subbaroyan Ministry was quite right in the national interest.\textsuperscript{24} Srinivasa Iyengar had stated that he was not aware of the development in Madras. Therefore, a resolution was passed in the AICC directing


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Indian Annual Register}, 1927, Vol.I, pp.26-31, and 41.45.
the CWC to obtain an explanation from the MLCP and submit it to the AICC for consideration. The Leaders of Tamilnadu who supported the Subbaroyan Ministry were not prepared to put up with this rebuke and attempted to annul the above resolution and succeeded.

In the CWC it was resolved that the MLCP had not done anything contrary to the Congress resolution. Instead by another resolution, the MLCP was congratulated for successfully obstructing the anti-national or communal Justice Party capturing power.25

Prakasam, the APCC President felt indignant at this unexpected development and issued a statement in which he stated that the MLCP had brought disrepute to the Congress.26 The KPCC supported the stand taken by Prakasam and both the APCC and KPCC opposed the CWC resolution. Thirty AICC members gave notice to convene the meeting of the AICC, before July 15, 1927 to discuss this issue.27 But the High Command foiled this attempt. Besides, the announcement of the visit of the

25 G. Rudrayya Chowdari, op. cit., p.70.
26 Ibid.
Simon Commission to this province forced this problem to recede to the background.  

By now, Srinivasa Iyenger began to withdraw from provincial politics after his clash with the Gandhians. He resigned from the Working Committee in 1929, for he was displeased to work under Rajaji who was nominated to head the Civil Disobedience Programme (Salt Satyagraha) to be launched in 1930. His final withdrawal from the Congress came on 28th August 1929. After his withdrawal from the scene, the factions in the Congress consolidated behind the leaderships of Rajaji and Satyamurthi, the disciple of Srinivasa Iyengar.

The Congress returned to the agitational strategy in 1930. The year 1931 witnessed several changes within the Tamilnadu Congress like the incorporation of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the cooperation between Rajaji and the moderate nationalists like Vaidyanatha Iyer of Madurai, Thiru Vi.Ka. and others.

28 G. Rudrayya Chowdari, op. cit., p.70.

Satyamurthi was a powerful orator. His poor economic status inclined him to sympathise with the everyday problems of common man. But Rajaji was more influential with the Congress High Command (the Congress leaders in the AICC particularly Gandhi and his ardent followers holding official positions and influence in the AICC) than Satyamurthi. 'The mutual intellectual and spiritual curiosity drew Rajaji and Gandhi together'.

In the TNCC election held in 1931 Rajaji desired to become President. Satyamurthi's group decided to support Rajaji for Presidentship on the condition that he should make Satyamurthi the Vice President and this was agreed to by Rajaji. But when the Presidential election was over and Satyamurthi was to be nominated as Vice-President as agreed to earlier, Rajaji's group nominated Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai, a follower of Rajaji, as the Vice-President. It was viewed that this was done purposely with the hope that if a non-Brahmin candidate was set up, Satyamurthi would be surely defeated. Enraged by this act of Rajaji, Satyamurthi instead of himself contesting, nominated Annamalai Pillai, another non-Brahmin to avenge himself on

30 D.J. Arnold, Nationalism and Regional Politics: Tamilnadu, India 1920-37, Ph.D., Thesis (University of Sussex, 1973), p.188.
Rajaji. The resulting stalemate was solved by a compromise by which both the candidates withdrew and Satyamurthi became the Vice-President. Subsequently, Satyamurthi's group succeeded in capturing the entire Executive Committee. Kamaraj's biographer T.S. Chockalingam while referring to these events has confirmed that the election of Satyamurthi as the Vice-President and his men in the Executive were entirely the work of Kamaraj, the disciple of Satyamurthi.

1933-1939

In the period between 1933-39, Satyamurthi's supporters continued to act as a distinct faction within the TPCC. By the end of 1933, the British Government issued a White Paper containing the proposals for the future Constitution of India. Some of the Congressmen at the national level wanted to utilise this opportunity created by the White Paper proposals to bring about a change in the Congress programme. In the third week of May 1934, the INC at its Patna meeting decided to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement and wanted to go ahead for the Council-Entry Programme.

31 D.J. Arnold, op. cit., p.188.
32 The Hindu, 30 October, 1933.
33 B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., p.961.
Consequently, the reorganisation of the Congress got an impetus all over the country. After the Patna Congress, Rajaji who was a 'no changer' acquiesced in the Congress's new electoral strategy. After the Patna session there was little opportunity for disagreement on the Council Entry Programme but the battle between the two groups continued in the INC. Satyamurthi who masterminded the Legislative Assembly and the District Board election campaigns from 1934 to 36 dominated the organisation at least temporarily.

The Congress organisation had grown numerically stronger than before and the local election campaigns brought to the fore much of the intrigues, and factional fighting inside the Congress. By the end of 1936 the Tamilnadu Congress had 65,105 members on its rolls. Not only the local elections but also the organisational elections created rivalry among leaders.

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34 B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., p.961.

35 Ibid.

36 Government of India, (Home, Pol), 18 February, 1930, NA.

who tried to get hold of the control of the party in many districts. Thus the Provincial and INC increasingly became battlegrounds for factional fighting.38

On the eve of the Provincial election of 1936 the TPCC annual Conference was held at Karaikudi (Ramnad District) in January, 1936. Satyamurthi contested for Party leadership. C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, a politician from Chingleput whose political views were identical with those of Satyamurthi and who had earlier been a lieutenant of Srinivasa Iyengar, opposed Satyamurthi in the TPCC Presidential election. In this election Rajaji supported Satyamurthi. Such a new-found affinity between Rajaji and Satyamurthi was viewed differently and it was thought that communal considerations made Rajaji to extend support to Satyamurthi.39


39 Kudi Arasu, 16 February, 1936. Even the ardent followers of Rajaji, like Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai was not happy over this situation. He wrote an article in E.V.R.’s Kudi Arasu under the pseudonym ‘Karaikkudi Ooliyar Subbiah Pillai’ (Karaikkudi Worker Subbiah Pillai). The title of the article was ‘Karaikkudiyil Kumbakonangal’ (a mischievous act is called Kumbakonam act). He traced in that article how far the Brahmin leaders were treacherous and cunning. It appears that he had written that article in a moment of emotion. He remained faithful to Rajaji till his death.
The Justicites utilised this opportunity to criticise the Brahminical tendency to unite during their hour of crisis.40

In the Tiruchirappalli Municipal elections of 1936, the official Congress candidate, P. Rathinavelu Thevar, an old Justicite, was defeated by a dissident candidate Ponniah Pillai, sponsored by T.S.S. Rajan who was one of the oldest members of the Congress and a close associate of Rajaji.41 It was declared that T.S.S. Rajan did this with the blessings of Rajaji. Rajaji, in order to prove his innocence in this affair, resigned from the Congress. Satyamurthi, an agile politician, clearly commanded widespread support throughout Tamilnadu. He was also well poised to achieve his chief ambition of occupying the high office in Tamilnadu.

Rajaji's resignation was known to the CWC. Vallabhai Patel requested Satyamurthi in a letter of 12 August, 1936 to persuade Rajaji to withdraw his resignation.42 Satyamurthi had to give up his claim

40 Dravidanadu, 3 March, 1946.

41 AICC File P(i) of 1936, NMML.

over the Madras University Constituency to bring back Rajaji. It was Satyamurthi's surrender of his 'prescriptive and moral right' to this end that really paved the way for Rajaji's accession to power. Erskine, the Governor wrote:

"Mr. Rajagopalachari has returned to politics and has ousted Satyamurthi from the leadership of Tamilnadu Congress. Indeed Satyamurthi is not now standing for any seat for the local legislature and he has been forced to remain at the centre."\textsuperscript{43}

Satyamurthi was thus eliminated from the State politics and was elected to the Central Assembly. In December, 1936 in the Presidential election to the TPCC, Muthuranga Mudaliar contested again. In this election he avenged his earlier defeat by winning the Presidential election.

Two factors were responsible for Muthuranga Mudaliar's success this time. In the first instance this was owing to the increase in the number of Non-Brahmins as members in the Congress. The defections from the Justice Party by the end of 1936, led to an increase in the strength of the Non-Brahmins in the Congress. Varadarajulu Naidu returned to the Congress

\textsuperscript{43} 'Erskine Papers', India Record Office, MSS, EUR.D.596, File No.17, Micro Film, NAI.
after his ten-year association with the Justice Party. T.A. Ramalingam Chetty, another non-Brahmin leader who left the Congress during 1925 Kancheepuram Conference now returned to the Congress. S. Ramanathan was yet another such homecoming Congressman who became the follower of Rajaji. J.L.P. Roche Victoria was also readmitted into the Congress. However these men entertained a strong non-Brahmin sentiment even after their reentry into the Congress. Mudaliar's election signalled an irreparable breach between Rajaji and Satyamurthi, creating a long-term fatal division in the whole of the TPCC. Thus these two leaders who remained ideologically divided in the 1920s and 30s began to reinforce it in terms of personality conflicts later.

In the factional tussle that enveloped the TPCC, Prakasam played a main role. Rajaji had to go along with Prakasam in order to ensure his own leadership.

An important factor that strengthened the factions inside the Congress was the absence of a strong opposition outside. The Justice Party which was a challenge to the Congress had lost its hold. The


45 Ibid.
faction-ridden Justice Party could not match the new methods employed and the new prospects promised by the Congress in the elections. In the 1936 elections the Congress won all but 9 of the general seats and 159 out of the total of 215 seats defeating prominent Justice leaders like the Raja of Bobbili, P.T. Rajan, A.P. Patro and others.

Henceforward, the Congress that had grown to be so important organised a network of Committees, in the whole Province and forged contacts with groups ranging from students to Zamindars. Congress membership in Tamilnadu and Andhra regions which had stood at 115,971 in 1936 rose to 394,397 in the next two years.

Tamilnadu politics changed rapidly in the year following Rajaji’s assumption of power in 1937 as Premier. Rajaji was at the pinnacle of his power, in the years from 1937 to 39, but the political forces that were eventually to drive him into the political

46 **Jaya Bharathi**, 22, July, 1936, Native Newspaper Report (NNR), TA.


wilderness were already in the embryonic stage. Lord Erskine's letter to Linlithgow on 5 August 1937, bears testimony to his dictatorial character.49

"As to the Premier himself, there is no doubt that he is a sort of dictator and in fact runs the whole show."50

Satyamurthi who was deprived of the chance to become the Premier and forced out of Assembly affairs, found his way into Tamilnadu politics through the Corporation of Madras.

In 1939 in the TNCC Presidential election Satyamurthi was opposed by O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar. Satyamurthi was defeated by OPR who got 35 votes more.51 This was because Rajaji continued to influence TNCC elections till 1940.52


50 Ibid.

51 Janasakthi, 4 January, 1939.

52 V.K. Narasimhan, 'Kamaraj a Study', (Bombay, 1967), pp.16-22. 'Rajaji's power over Tamilnadu party organisation was not seriously at risk.'