CHAPTER V

THE O.P. RAMASAMY REDDIAR MINISTRY AND THE TNCC

After the factional conflict in the Presidency resulted in the removal of Prakasam, the Deputy Leader of the Madras Legislature Congress Party, O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar became the Premier, though he did not head any faction. O.P.R. was acceptable to both the Tamilnadu factions led respectively by Kamaraj and Rajaji and to the Andhra faction as well.

When O.P.R. was elected as the leader of the MLCP, Rajaji's group expected that he would act only as the leader appointing some one as Premier. They also believed that since O.P.R. did not possess a working knowledge of English it would not be possible for him to run the administration. But contrary to their expectations, O.P.R. formed the Ministry himself.¹ The Dravidar Kazhagam, particularly its leader E.V.R., felt happy over the selection of O.P.R. They felt happy because he was the first non-Brahmin Congress Premier.²


² The Liberator, 11 April, 1947.
O.P.R.'s ministry did not face as much opposition as Prakasam's did. However Prakasam personally opposed several policies and activities of the O.P.R. Ministry. Though Prakasam would criticise O.P.R., he could never successfully point an accusing finger against him. O.P.R. was considered a saintly man in politics. The biographer of O.P.R. portrays a number of incidents to prove the saintly qualities of O.P.R.\footnote{Somalay, op. cit., p.234.}

Early in 1947, factional conflict re-emerged in the TNCC. O.P.R. did not play any role in it but appeared to be a mere witness to it. The factional trouble ensued because of Kamaraj's policy that Congress should not contest in the forthcoming District Board, Panchayat and other Local Bodies elections.

The TNCC began its session on 21 April, 1947 in which, out of a total of 243 PCC members 183 were present.\footnote{The Hindu, 22 April, 1947; Viduthalai, 22 April, 1947.} Kamaraj informed the House that he had received two resolutions, one expressing no confidence in him and the other expressing confidence in him.
When he asked the PCC members, who had no confidence in him, to raise their hands, none did so and when he asked for those who had confidence in him only 113 raised their hands. Later, Chidambara Bharathi, who opposed Rajaji in the Tirupparankundram Workers’ Conference, now a Congress Worker alleged that Kamaraj had agreed to give to Rajaji’s group five seats in the TNCC Working Committee in return for the support Rajaji may extend to Kamaraj.

In course of time, O.P.R. began to face serious opposition from Vaidyanatha Iyer and N.S. Varadachari of Rajaji’s group with regard to abolition of Inam lands. The MLCP which met on 8 October, 1947 decided by 81 votes against 76 that all temples and charitable Inam lands be included in the scope of the proposed legislation for abolition of Zamindari and other Estates. Vaidyanatha Iyer the leader of the Rajaji group in the party announced his decision to resign from the party on this issue.

5 F.R. p.4-8, 12 May, 1947, TA

6 Ibid.

7 F.R. Home, Pol., p.4-18, dt 11 October, 1947, TA.
Vaidyanatha Iyer who was against the inclusion of Inam lands in the proposed Bill pointed out that Prakasam’s earlier Bill dealt with abolition of Zamindars only and that the O.P.R. Ministry was including the Inams too without proper investigation into the matter. He contended that he could hardly be ‘a party to this kind of swindling of sacred places and charities.’ O.P.R. replied that secular government did not mean that government ought to be silent when swindling takes place in public trusts.

Subbaroyan, another member of Rajaji’s group also opposed O.P.R. when the Zamindari Abolition Bill was introduced with retrospective effect. Subbaroyan, himself a Zamindar, voted against this decision.

This act of Subbaroyan was brought to the notice of the Congress High Command. The Secretary of the AICC, Shankar Rao, wanted to know from Subbaroyan whether he had voted against the Cabinet decision. He replied that he was surprised to receive letters demanding explanations, without informing him the complainants. He added that, "discipline could not be maintained merely by threats and actions on information."\(^8\)

\(^8\) Rajendra Prasad Papers, 9 C/48, NA; AICC File No. P.B.7/1947 NMML, No.23/C/46-47, NA.
When more complaints were made against him to the High Command Subbaroyan began to complain about O.P.R. In a letter addressed to Rajendra Prasad, Subbaroyan complained.

"I think that you are aware that the affairs of the Congress Legislature Party in our Province had been unfortunately in a sad state and there was absence of cohesion, unity and harmony that were necessary for enabling the Party to maintain a high standard of honour and efficiency or to do its very best for the people".

A second problem faced by O.P.R. pertained to the Backward Classes. While Prakasam was the Premier he attempted to modify the Communal G.O. of 1928. The Communal G.O. fixed the number and order of rotation of the communities for recruitment to various services in the Government. The principle of the Communal G.O. was accepted by the Parliament and the Governments and the Public Service Commissions were directed to give effect to it. The formula adopted in 1928 was raised so as to give more representation to Non-Brahmins. The

9 The Liberator, 1 December, 1947.
10 The Liberator, 1 December, 1947.

. Non-Brahmin (Hindus), II. Harijan, III. Backward Class Non-Brahmin (Hindus), IV. Non-Brahmin (Hindus), V. Brahmins, VI. Non-Brahmin (Hindus), VII. Muslim, VIII. Non-Brahmin (Hindus), IX. Anglo Indians, X. Non-Brahmin (Hindus), XI. Harijan, XII. Non-Brahmin (Hindu), XIII. Brahmin, XIV. Backward Class (Hindu) Non-Brahmin.
revision was opposed by Rajaji’s men who were carefully planning to bring back Rajaji as the Premier of Madras Presidency.\footnote{11}

The revision of the Communal G.O. instead of satisfying the non-Brahmins, created problems. Some of the non-Brahmin communities felt that the G.O. would help only the high caste non-Brahmins. R.V. Swaminathan, a member of the most backward Mukkulathor community warned that instead of Brahmin - Non-Brahmin conflict a Backward non-Brahmin and Forward non-Brahmin conflict would be created by this G.O.\footnote{12} He suggested that the Communal G.O. should be altered to give seats according to the numerical strength of the communities.

In March 1948, O.P.R. completed one year of his term of Premiership. Again the election of a new leader came up before the party. Prakasam wanted to contest this time also. 197 members of the MLCP attended the meeting to choose the leader.

The name of Prakasam was proposed by R.V. Swaminathan and seconded by Thennetti Viswanatham.

\footnote{11}{Rajendra Prasad Papers, 23 C/46-47, S.No.99, NA.}

\footnote{12}{Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol.I, 1948-49; Muruga Dhanushkodi, op. cit., p.123.}
Dr. Rajan proposed O.P.R.'s name which was seconded by one Kanniappan. In the election one section of Rajaji's group supported O.P.R. and another section supported Prakasam. A number of partymen were expected to act against O.P.R. for during his tenure of Premiership he was too strict and the partymen could not enjoy patronage.

However, the re-election of O.P.R. as leader of the Congress Legislature Party closed 'decisively' for the moment a chapter of intrigue and the activities of vested interests against O.P.R. But, a number of members of the C.L.P. in the Provincial Legislature decided to form a "ginger group" named "The Congress


The Party position in March 1948 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents (unattached)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>212</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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14 The Liberator, 29 March, 1948.

15 Ibid., 29 March, 1948.
Legislature Party Reform Group" as the legislative measures and the administration of the Provincial Government required improvement. Vaidyanatha Iyer was the convenor of that group which comprised about thirty members. The formation of this group was viewed as an effort to put pressure on the Premier.

The Brahmins considered O.P.R. a champion of non-Brahmins of the Congress.\textsuperscript{16} Bharatha Devi, a pro-Brahmin newspaper called O.P.R., a 'Vibhudhi Poosum Ramasamy Periyar' (E.V.R. with sacred ash on his forehead) and Swadesamitran referred to his Ministry as a 'Brahmana Duvesha Sabha' (Brahmin hating Assembly).\textsuperscript{17} The conflict between Prakasam and O.P.R. was also viewed as a Brahmin and non-Brahmin struggle.

After the election of the Premier, the TNCC Presidential election was held on May 13, 1948. Kamaraj was unanimously elected as there was no

\textsuperscript{16} Dravidanadu, 11 April, 1948.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., "Whenever they (Brahmins) speak at platforms they speak correctly but whenever they met individually the communalism catch Hold of them." (This reported speech of O.P.R. reported in Dravidanadu could not be traced out in any other source).
combined opposition from Rajaji or Prakasam. Now, Prakasam's attacks were mainly directed towards O.P.R. Government's food policy. He complained that some of the Ministers were obtaining licenses for personal businesses in the names of their relatives and were using their influence to get scarce materials for their businesses while the rest of the country suffered. Prakasam presented his complaints to Rajendra Prasad, the AICC President who passed it on to O.P.R. for remarks.

O.P.R. after getting explanations from the concerned persons, passed the papers back to the President of the AICC with whom it was lying for six months. This problem which had been undertaken by Prakasam continued up to the exit of Prakasam in 1952.

O.P.R. was not supported by Kamaraj, Rajaji and Prakasam during his second term of office. There were

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Rajendra Prasad Papers, No.23/C/46-47, NA.

"I do not know what the AICC can do in such case. It simply means that it has to look into every small little act of a minister or an officer under the minister and I do not think it is possible for the office to undertake such detailed examination of everyday happenings."
complaints that partymen could not meet him. There was dissatisfaction among the party ranks because getting things done for the partymen was nearly impossible. It was also alleged that he had ordered an enquiry against four members of the MLCP for an alleged interference in the Government activities at Tirunelveli. He expected the partymen not to interfere with the functioning of the Government.

Therefore, O.P.R. sent a circular in which he had instructed the officials not to listen or pay heed to the recommendations of the Legislators, on the basis of a letter received from the AICC President Prasad.\(^\text{20}\)

The Congress Legislators demanded the withdrawal of that circular but O.P.R. refused to do so.\(^\text{21}\) O.P.R.'s simplicity and his method of approach was not liked by the Congressmen.\(^\text{22}\)

At a political conference in Ramnad district Kamaraj was reported to have stated that ministers


\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{22}\) *Private Papers of O.P.R.* Letters from Rajaji to O.P.R. dated 25 January, 1948, NMML.
should consult the TNCC before introducing any reforms. He was also reported to have declared the Rural Development Scheme a waste.²³

Brahmin members of the Congress were against the Communal G.O. and a resolution urging that caste, religion, and communal distinctions should not be recognised in the matters of recruitment to services, and admissions to educational or other institutions was passed by them.²⁴

When opposition was mounting against him, O.P.R. was busy with the Hindu Religious Endowment (Amendment) Act. O.P.R. believed that the spread of atheism was mainly due to the improper management of Hindu Religious Endowments. Hence in his Hindu Religious Endowment (Amendment) Bill strong measures were included to prevent the exploitation of Endowment properties.²⁵


²⁴ Viduthalai, 3 January, 1949.

²⁵ Ibid.
This measure of O.P.R. was viewed as interference by the Government in religious matters. O.P.R.'s Hindu Religious Endowment Bill and the Communal G.O. were the two issues which were responsible for the opposition groups in the Congress to work for his fall from power. It became clear to O.P.R. that he could not continue in power in the face of internal opposition. O.P.R. announced his decision not to continue further as Premier. He referred to the group politics in his statement as the basic reason for his quitting politics. After this announcement, the power struggle started once again. Subbaroyan was planning to become the Premier and was working for it.

Muthuranga Mudaliar, as long as he was alive used to prevent the steps taken by the groups to overthrow O.P.R. But after his death, Kamaraj wanted to bring Bakthavatsalam as Premier. Prakasam decided

26 Somalay, op. cit., pp.310-328.

27 Ibid., "I also pointed out that group politics within the Congress Party are not conducive for good administration and it weakens Congress organisation and the country. I do not find a favourable response to my appeal but on the other hand I find that group politics are still dominating."

28 Viduthalai, 8 February, 1949.
to avenge his defeats by supporting the candidature of Subbaroyan. Among the Legislators only 24 members were prepared to accept O.P.R. or any candidate of his choice.29 These 24 votes were the neutral votes without which it would be impossible for either Kamaraj’s or Rajaji’s group to win.30 P.S. Kumarasamy Raja of Rajapalayam, a non-Brahmin of Telugu speaking minority community, was announced as a compromise candidate by Kamaraj and O.P.R. supported Subbaroyan’s candidature.31

The Congress Legislature Party met on 31st March, 1949 to elect a new leader. 198 out of the 201 members were present and one did not exercise his vote. P.S. Kumarasamy Raja was proposed by Bakthavatsalam and seconded by Gopal Reddy. His opponent Subbaroyan was proposed by Nachiappa Gounder and seconded by Perumalsami Reddiar. 105 votes were in favour of Kumarasamy Raja and 89 went to Subbaroyan as three were declared invalid. Kumarasamy Raja was thus elected as

29 Somalay, op. cit., p.337.

30 Ibid., p.338

31 Ibid.
Leader of the Madras Legislature Congress Party. O.P.R. felt bitter about the effect of 'group politics' in Tamilnadu. He advised:

"Let group interests and personal interests merge in the greater interests of the common goal. My earnest appeal to Kamaraj Nadar and Prakasam and other leaders is this: 'Let us stand united for divided we would fall. Whatever adjustments, whatever explanations that may be necessary in the cabinet may be made by common agreement."  

Kamaraj was the deciding factor in the election of Kumarasamy Raja and his clout appeared to be the strongest. In the Cabinet formation also, Kamaraj's influence was witnessed.

The ministry of O.P.R. too went out of office as a result of factional conflict and realignments of groups though he was not a member of any group. The realignment took place not on the basis of any ideology but only on the basis of the personal interests of the individuals.

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33 The Hindu, 31 March, 1949.