CHAPTER - IV

PATTALI MAKKAL KATCHI

FORMATION AID MOBILIZATION
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PATTALI MAKKAL KATCHI: FORMATION AND MOBILIZATION

While the earlier section dealt with the activities of the reactivated Vanniar Sangam in mobilizing the scattered and shattered loyalties of the Vanniars into a single and unified direction, this section deals with some other activities that endeavour to evoke a common consciousness not only among the Vanniars but also between Vanniars and other castes of similar standing. The mobilization of people belonging to different castes but equal in social and economic status is done without compromising the exclusive Vanniar character of the Vanniar Sangam.

The Vanniar Sangam, retaining its single caste character, tries to form a federation of castes by uniting various caste Sangams under a common umbrella, at the same time recognizing the exclusive caste characters of the caste Sangams and their autonomy in organizational matters. This arises from the shared conviction among the caste Sangams that it is only through their unity that their grievances can be redressed and not through fighting separately, thereby working at cross purposes which their enemies can make use of. In one of the conference in which 14 caste Sangams participated, Ramdoss expressed the above point when he said “For petty electoral purposes, the existing parties put the unity of the caste Sangam under and thereby weaken our strength. Therefore we must bring all caste Sangams into a federal structure to fight for attaining our rights”.1
In 1989, a Vanniar-Devendrakula Velalar Unity Conference was held in Madurai, which declared its aim as one of fighting together to get their rights recognized, and for social justice.²

In a similar vein, a Vanniar-Vannar unity Conference was convened in February 1990 at Thiruthani, and a Vanniar- Adi Dravida Unity Conference was conducted in Arur in September 1990 and at Vellore in December 1990.³

All these conferences must be understood in the context of democratic politics, which places special emphasis on number. Therefore the one who commands the support of more numbers of people will be paid special attention. If one group fights separately the ability of the group to command wide support is limited, but when it unites itself with other groups on the ground of shared purpose, the numerical preponderance will lead to speedier redressal of their grievances.

Till the 1980s as it was mentioned earlier, the class and ideological character of the various political parties weaned the masses, particularly the Vanniars, away from their caste loyalties. This trend declined when the Vanniar Sangam revived the community sentiment of the Vanniars and unified the support of the masses in one singular direction. To this was added more momentum by the formation of the political party the PMK whose support is mainly derived from Vanniars, since its inception. Nonetheless the class character of the PMK, as a party of the depressed class predisposes the party to widen its support. To this effect various
programmes were conducted by the PMK through which it sought to widen its base. The dual purpose of the PMK was to take over the government to achieve its ends by increasing its numbers and to wean away the differential loyalties of Vanniars from various political parties by providing an alternative to them. This second purpose led to the overlapping and amalgamation of caste and party loyalties.

A political party like the PMK, with its alleged one caste character (in most parts of Tamilnadu people view the PMK as the party of the Vanniars) and support of only 20% population cannot capture power. There arises the need to show the PMK as the party of depressed castes, particularly Scheduled Castes. The common class character of PMK is to send signals to castes which suffer from various social disabilities, that the PMK represents their aspirations. This they have to do in every district through powerful promises such as declaring that if the PMK comes to power it will nominate an SC candidate as the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and the promise to declare Ambedkar's birthday as a national holiday. The inclusion of Ambedkar's picture in the party documents and pamphlets is to solicit the support of Schedule Caste. If they united with the Vanniars, both would constitute 50% of votes, enough to capture the seat of power.

The attempts to bring about unity between the Vanniars and the Schedule Caste people are just a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, and till recent days, if not in the present time, the relationship between these two groups was one of confrontation. It was not uncommon to see or hear about Harijan-Vanniar clashes in Vanniar dominated areas, but the PMK and its
leaders’ effort to create an atmosphere of unity has significantly reduced the occurrence of strifes between the Vanniars and the Harijans. In this respect, citing one of the incidents in which Ramdoss himself participated to try to bring about unity between these two is relevant. This incident took place in Kudithanki.

In that village the dead body of a Harijan was not allowed to be taken through the streets of the Vanniars, but Ramdoss himself negotiated with the Vanniars and oversaw the passage of the dead body through the Vanniars streets. The PMK’s plea for the total implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, which will benefit all the Backward Classes in Tamilnadu and India as whole, is an expression of the depressed class character of the PMK.

One of the important factors that drew all youths and particularly the majority of the Vanniar youth are Tamil nationalism and anti-Brahminism, characteristic of Dravidian parties such as the DMK and the AIADMK. By advocating Tamil nationalism, the PMK could galvanize the Vanniar youth in particular and youth in general. In Tamilnadu politics every political party tries to show itself as the party that protects Tamil interests, this is expressed in the form of supporting the cause of separate Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka and the LTTE, glorifying Tamil and using Tamil in every activity, office, educational institution etc. And it is no surprise that the PMK also took up this Tamil cause so that its posture on the third front could be effectively proved.
The culmination of the series of endeavours that the PMK under took to show itself as a party dedicated Tamils’ welfare was reached with the convening of a conference on Tamils right to live (Tamilar Valzhvurimai Maanadu) in September 1992. In this conference the violence perpetrated on Tamils in Karnataka, Bombay and Sri Lanka was condemned and strong solidarity was expressed with the LTTE's struggle for the liberation of Tamil Eelam. A new constitution that recognizes the right to self-determination of every national in India was demanded. All these demands and condemnation sounded as the call for separatism in the ears of the Government, leading to the arrest of the PMK leaders.

One has to wait and see whether the PMK has achieved what it aims at as a party of the depressed class, a third front and as an alternative to the major existing parties, namely the DMK and the AIADMK.

**Problems** and Background

The Vanniar Sangam formed in 1980 began conducting processions, conferences and meetings. It formed a big caste-oriented group. Dr.Ramdoss, the founder of the Vanniar Sangam and other leaders of this Sangam did the mobilization in a broad manner. With the help of other caste people the Vanniar Movement was renamed the Pattali Makkal Katch in 1989. But the Vanniar Sangam continues to exist. This Sangam interlinked with some other caste people and Sangams. It conducted some inter-caste conferences and rallies in order to get the reservation based on population. It insisted on other castes’ demands too.
Fragmented Consolidation

After 1987, the Vanniar Sangam conducted processions and meetings along with other castes. A caste sammelan was organised at Madras with the coalition of 14 castes. Ramdoss the leader of the sammelan, mentioned in his speech that the Vanniars would help all the depressed castes struggling for their basic rights. He further mentioned that his party was ready to negotiate its reservation demands for the development of depressed castes.

The Vanniars, on behalf of the Vanniar Sangam, organized some meetings with other castes in order to integrate all the depressed castes together. The Vanniar-Devendra Kula Velalar Conference at Madurai, the Vanniar-Adi Dravida Unity Conference at Vellore and at Arur, the Vanniar-Arunthathiyyar Elutchi Conference at Erode, the Vanniar-Vannar Elutehi Conference at Tirutani and Vanniar-Islamiar Religious Tolerance Conference at Mailaduthurai were conducted in order to extend the mobilization to the Adi-Dravidars and minorities.

In those conferences, the other castes’ demands were also emphasized by the Vanniar Sangam. For instance, the Vanniar Sangam supported the Adi-Dravidars’ demands for Ramanathapuram Imanuel Devendrar District, Sundaralinga Kudumbnan Transport Corporation and Mozhignaeru Deva Neiyapavanar’s name for Tanjore Tamil University. Hence the depressed castes associated themselves with the Vanniar Sangam. In the conference
conducted at Madurai by Ramdoss, Adi-Dravidars, Mukulathors, Yadavar, and barbers participated.

While Ramdoss mobilized his people, he preferred other caste leaders joining the PMK. The All India Devendrakula Velalar Sangam’s founder, John Pandian, allied with the PMK Youth Federation Leadership. Later he resigned the post. Irumporai Gunasekaran, Vadivel Ragavan, Murugavelrajan formed the Devendra Peravai. It got Adi-Dravidars’ support in the southern districts like Madurai.

Generally 50% of the posts are given to Adi-Dravidars in the PMK party. Some important seats have been offered to other caste people also as shown hereunder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Post</th>
<th>Caste</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dalit Ezhilmalai</td>
<td>SC (Parayan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kunankudi Aniba</td>
<td>BC (Muslim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party Trustee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Krishnakanth Yathav</td>
<td>BC (Konar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy General Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ravichandran Thuraisamy</td>
<td>BC (Nadar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy President</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Palaniswami</td>
<td>ST</td>
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<td>Thalaivar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maanila Makkal Paathukapu Ani</td>
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Consolidation

The PMK’s concerned with party consolidation activities consists of two steps— one carrying over the Vanniar loyalty and support to the political party and second broadening its programme to include people other than of their caste. The need to broaden the party so as to include other caste members arises from current necessities. The Vanniars constitute 20% of the population of TN, which is not large enough to form a Government in their own. So the need to widen its base under a programme appealing to all becomes obvious. This effort also facilitates the supply of other caste votes especially the votes of the Scheduled Castes. Actually speaking one’s allegiance to the Sangam need not coincide with one’s allegiance to a single political party. But the Sangam believes that a party of its own would make its members’ loyalty coterminous with their party loyalty.

The endeavour to broaden the party activities operates at three levels:

1) Class Level.

2) Linguistic Nationalistic Level, and

3) Ideological Level.
Class level

The PMK’s projection as a party of the depressed classes is to solicit SCs support. Traditionally the SC people were swinging their political loyalty from one party to another. That is to say, their loyalty was floating, only to be caught by attractive promises. Having realised this, the PMK assumed the form of a party of the depressed and oppressed classes. The effort to seek the SCs allegiance was done not only through appealing promises but also through various programmes. In the election manifesto, the PMK favoured the occupation of the CM's chair by an SC candidate and called for abolishing the relics of untouchability, starting an untouchability eradication wing, declaration of Ambedkar's birthday as a national holiday—pronouncements and promises that appealed strongly to the SC people.

The promises aside, many action-oriented programmes in which attempts were made to bring Vanniars and other depressed castes together were conducted. The series of conferences such as Vanniar-Devendra Kula Velalar Conference in Madurai, Vanniar-Vannar Conference in Thiruthani, Vanniar-Adi-Dravidar Unity Conference in Arur and Vellore, Vanniar-Arunthathiyar Conference, Vanniar-Muslim Conference, SC-BC Conference all had the implicit aim of bringing the Vanniars and other depressed classes under one political roof.

The practical example of bringing Vanniars and Scheduled Castes together is provided by an incident in Kudithanki village near Thanjavur, in which Ramdoss led the carrying of the dead body of an Adi-Dravidar
through the streets of the Vanniars to the cremation ground even in the face of opposition from the Vanniars.7

**Linguistic-Nationalistic Lewi**

The PMK’s desire to project itself as a Backward Classes Party similar to the Bahujan Samaj Party cannot be done without the inclusion of the strategy of glorifying Tamil. Right from the pre-Independence days, beginning with the Justice Party, the Dravidian ideology has been part of every regional party of Tamilnadu. It is through the Dravidian ideology, exalting Tamil language, glorifying Dravidian civilization and the Tamil way of life that the regional parties acquired the support of the masses. It was a practical strategy to unite the masses into a single political identity, because no other strategy would have proved useful with the masses who are otherwise divided in numerous ways. Mobilization around Dravidian identity, which is mainly Tamil identity, is nothing but ethnic mobilization. This mobilization has been successful enough to completely wipe out the presence of national parties such as the Congress Party.

The Tamil identity also proved successful in mobilizing people of all communities except Brahmins in Tamilnadu, for the Dravidian identity co-exists with Tamil identity and automatically excludes Brahmins. This completes a party to take up this issue and support Tamil nationalism if it wants to successfully project itself as the party of the Backward Classes and the depressed classes.
Therefore the PMK's purpose to project itself as the forum for all BCs, religious minorities, and SCs necessitated the subscription to Tamil nationalism and Tamil identity. The purpose of the PMK to emerge as a third force against the existing Dravidian parties and their ability to woo Vanniar and Backward Classes votes under the pretext of Dravidian ideology, calls for weaning away the Vanniar youth and the youth of other Backward Classes from the Dravidian parties by the PMK also espousing the Tamil identity.

The PMK made serious efforts to translate the ideas into practice. It started with discarding caste names attached to the names of leaders in favour of generic Tamil-glorifying names. For example, before launching the PMK, Ramdoss was called Ina Maanakavalar (protector of the dignity of the community). After the PMK came into being, he is called Makkal Kavalar (protector of the People). Theeran, the president of the PMK gave up his earlier name of Ina Murasu (Community trumpet) and took on the name ol Makkal Murasu (people’s trumpet).

Then they began to voice their concern about the sufferings of Tamils wherever it occurred. Supporting the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka became part of the PMK's programme. The election manifesto of the PMK expressed its support for the LTTE struggle for a separate Tamil Lelam and assured the Tamils of solidarity with them. Popularising Tamil at every level formed an important ingredient of the PMK's party programme as it is evident from the manifesto which says "Tamil everywhere, Tamil in everything," "Starting Tamil University" etc.
The culmination of the PMK's efforts to identify itself with the Tamils' cause was reached with a special conference on The Tamils' Right to live. In the conference every leader who attended talked for Tamil and about Tamil. This conference strongly argued for self-determination for Tamil. One resolution demanded that a new Constitution should be evolved for the country, incorporating the "right of self-determination of all nationalities" and that a "constituent assembly" should be formed for this "specific purpose".10

They also expressed their concern over the violence perpetrated on Tamil people in Karnataka and Sri Lanka. Another resolution read the gruesome happenings in Karnataka against the Tamils, the every day threat to the Tamilnadu coastal fishermen by the Sri Lankan navy, the utter disregard for the lives of the Sri Lankan Tamils, all speak volumes of the sense of insecurity among the Tamils, here as well as abroad. Neither the Government of India nor the state Governments in Tamilnadu and Karnataka have shown any sympathy in this regard”.11

The separatist tone of the conference alarmed the then state Government that it went on to arrest Ramdoss, and the PMK MLA Ramachandran and some others. The demand for a new Constitution giving due rights to the State Governments in other words, a Constitution that expresses true federalism, could also be seen in the light of the demand for autonomy at state level and federal set up at central level (Manila Suyatchi Mathiyil Kootatchi).12 Even though the argument for a federal set up is as old as the Dravidian parties, the PMK demand for a new Constitution
included the recognition of right to self-determination for various nationalities. All this helped the PMK to emerge equally vigorous as the other Dravidian parties in so far as the Tamil identity is concerned. One newspaper caption called the PMK the Third Force. An other caption in the *Times of India* read Third front.

**The Confluence of Ideologies**

One should not be surprised to see the photographs of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidar Kazhagam, the champion of the non-Brahmin cause, B.R.Ambedkar, the bulwark of the emancipation of the SCs, and Karl Marx, the prophet of the poor all over the world, in the PMK party membership form or in any pamphlet of the party. This is giving into another political exigency. A party which wants to broaden its base should take proper account of the champions of the respective people, the Backward Classes, the SCs and the depressed classes (poor in general).

The PMK is clearly a practical programme, in that all the ideas of these three great leaders have been converted into action-oriented programmes. A party which speaks for the Tamils cannot exclude the ideas of Periyar, a party speaking for Schedule Castes cannot operate successfully without talking about Ambedkar and his ideas, and a party which is programmed for the poor and the oppressed must give due recognition to Karl Marx. That the PMK has given room to the ideals of all these three leaders should not be surprising. Ramdoss has said "we have Periyar for social justice, Ambedkar for democracy and Karl Marx for socialism and all
these three ideas are part of our party's ideology." This ideological base has helped the PMK to mobilize different sections of the Tamil people into a formidable force to reckon with.

**Strategy**

The PMK was so careful in defining its principles that all communities except Brahmins can join and support it in Tamilnadu.

The PMK allowed its members to maintain their own caste Sangams and to form separate groups depending on their castes. They mobilized their people in the name of that caste. In order to widen its support base, the PMK further mobilized the people with the ideals of Tamil ethnicity. Speeches, writings, activities, movies were the tools used to develop it. Through such tools the leaders emphasized the immediate basic needs.

**Concerted Efforts**

The Vanniar Sangam members and the other caste people strongly supported the PMK party. The party’s newspaper the *Thinapurac*M (Daily Revolution) explained the Tamilians problems clearly. Caste Sangam meetings and their decisions supported the PMK demands. Ramdoss and Theeran, the eloquent personalities, spread their party demands by conducting meetings. The books *Nethiyadi, Akni Ambukal, Nanum Oru Naxalthan, Chjithaiye Veliye Vaa* written by Ramdoss enlightened the young supporters, The party’s cultural group organized many programmes through which the rural people could understand the PMK's demands. Fifty-eight agitations were led by PMK in order to get the basic needs for all throughout
Tamilnadu. The actor-cum-party supporter Mansour Alikhan used the mass media (cinema) as his tool for party development.

**Analysis**

Both the PMK and the Vanniar Sangam are functioning separately for Vanniar rights. The Vanniar Sangam has been used as the vote bank of the PMK. The PMK emphasis Vanniar demands and supports the decisions of the Vanniar Sangam. PMK however is not only a Vanniar community party but also includes different castes, especially Adi-Dravidars. The demands of both Vanniar Sangam and the PMK are the same. In order to mobilize the people of other castes, the Vanniar Sangam organized several meetings and conferences among which the following are considered very important: Vanniar - Devendra Kula Velalar Conference at Madurai, Vanniar-Adi-Dravida Unity Conference at Vellore and at Arur, Vanniar-Aruthathiers Elutchi Conference at Erode, Vanniar-Vannan Elutchi Conference at Truthani and Vanniar-Islamiar Religious Tolerance Conference at Mayiladuthurai.

**Result**

Even today the Vanniar Sangam and the PMK are engaged in mobilization. Thereby the Vanniar caste solidarity is gradually being increased. The Vanniar Sangam and the PMK are the two tools through which the Vanniars press their demands. In fact the Vanniar solidarity has gradually been reinforced through the PMK and Vanniar Sangam through mobilization.
NOTES


9. Ibid. P.4-5.


11. Ibid.

