

**CONTEXTUALIZING CHARISMATIC  
LEADERSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF  
TAMIL NATIONALISM**

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## Certificate

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled **Contextualizing Charismatic Leadership: An Analysis of Tamil Nationalism**, submitted by **R. Thirunavukkarasu**, is in part-fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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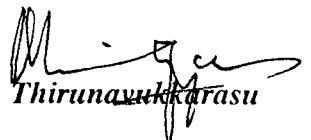
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# Contents

	Page
Acknowledgement	
<b>Chapter One</b> Introducing the Argument	<b>1-27</b>
<b>Chapter II</b> Charisma: A Conceptual Clarification	<b>28-48</b>
<b>Chapter III</b> The Social Context of Tamil Nationalism	<b>49-72</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b> The Context of Charismatic Leadership	<b>73-93</b>
<b>Chapter V</b> Concluding Remarks	<b>94-100</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>101-105</b>

*You were the first to teach us something  
absolutely fundamental: the indignity of  
speaking for others.*

*Gilles Deleuze to Michel Foucault*

# *Chapter One*

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## INTRODUCING THE ARGUMENT

### History, Historiographies and the Place of Region:

It has been well over half-a-century since political independence is attained by India. It has been referred to as a civilizational achievement with much euphoria as it was a collective response to the imperialist rule that lasted for almost three centuries. While narrating the historical events, the qualitative variation in different perspectives help us to group them in few categories. These few categories find, in essence, the freedom struggle or anti-imperialist struggle<sup>1</sup> as the pivot of modern Indian history. The imperialist historiography depicts what the British rule did or did not do and the nationalist historiography portrays the glorious anti-imperialist struggle and different stages in its development till its successful conclusion resulting in state-formation. Proposing an alternative view, to the above mutually antagonistic views, has become inevitable; they can be generally categorised as Cambridge School, Subaltern School and Regional School of historiography. These views to some extent, hold different understanding vis-à-vis both nationalist and imperialist historiography.

If power and profit-mongering by groups and cliques is what is at the core of the Indian National movement according to the Cambridge school, the Subalterns find the movement exclusively elitist, in sharp contrast to the struggle and aspirations of the subaltern masses whose interest were distinct and different

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I don't intend to identify the movement as anti-colonial. Because colonial structure did not disappear with the emergence of Congress Party's presence in the state apparatus. During colonial stage, there was a close, deep and intrinsic nexus-taking place between the Britishers and elites of Indian society. Therefore, the apparent disappearance of British rule did not ensure the end of colonialism in true sense. See, Aloysius 1997 (a).

from those of the elite whether imperial or national. According to R.Guha, "...The numerous peasant uprisings of the period, some of them massive in scope and rich in anti-colonialist consciousness waited in vain for a leadership to raise them above localism and generalise them into a nation-wide anti-imperialist campaign. It is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India"<sup>2</sup>.

The regionalist school of modern Indian historiography as exemplified in the works of D.A. Low (1968), J.H. Broomfield (1966, 1968) opens out yet another direction to move away from crude nationalism-dominated historiography. For these authors the interaction between the Britain and India is not a single encounter between two great monoliths. It is only at a rather "rarefied level that modern Indian history may be said to comprise a single all-India story."<sup>3</sup> Needless to say that this 'rarefaction' is ideological both in intent and character. Regional variations in the interactive process between the British and the Indian according to this view would provide a better framework for the study of Indian society.<sup>4</sup>

These new ways of looking at the history of modern India, are first and foremost a critique of the monolithic, uncontextualized and rarefied reading of the Indian response to the British rule under the unified title of the Nationalist Movement. That the nationalist history is elitist, false and insensitive to regional variations. The need for due attention on regional variations became important as various regions during the time of anti-imperialist struggle witnessed to the

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<sup>2</sup> R. Guha (1982), p. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> D.A. Low 1968, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Having drawn inspiration in the regionalist historiography, J.H. Broomfield did utilise the concept of regional elite - 'Bhadralok' in his study of Bengal politics. See Broomfield 1968.



emergence of various regional movements.<sup>5</sup> Those movements are: The Non-Brahmin - Tamil nationalist movement in the erstwhile Madras Presidency; the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam movement of Narayana Guru in Malayalam speaking area, the Peasant revolution in Telungana, Anti-caste - Dalit movement in Bombay Presidency. Essentially the core of the above said movements is for dismantling the highly hierarchized Indian society where the minority upper castes are found atop. This grave and serious concern, logically speaking, did not get enough space in the `nationalist' movement. Therefore, the emergence of such movements became inevitable.

Such a social context is not properly acknowledged by the `nationalist' historiography. Actually inadequate appreciation of such burning issues in colonial subcontinent led to the characterisation of such emancipatory movements as pro-British and as attempts to malign and to sabotage the nationalist aspirations.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach by `nationalist' historiography failed, at least, seems to have been, to understand the ethos and dynamics of modernity. It is beyond doubt and ambiguity that modernity with its basic principles -- equality, fraternity and liberty-enlightened the oppressed sections in the highly hierarchized social system. At least nationalist historiography has gone into a highly misconceived notion to equate modernity with pro-British stand.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> At the same time these movements could well be identified as counter movements to the Indian Nationalist movement led by the Congress argues Aloysius (1997a). This understanding draws its inspiration from the movement - counter-movement approach of Tourine. A (1985).

<sup>6</sup> Invariably all the nationalist historians endorse such perception and call it the conspiracy of British to divide and rule policy, See. Bipan Chandra (1979).

<sup>7</sup> Classical example for such an approach would be the recently published book on B.R. Ambedkar; the author says Ambedkar many times colluded with British, did not have nationalist feeling. See Arun Shorie : Worshipping False Gods (1997).

fundamental flaw has caused the emergence of a highly insensitive approach to regional variations.

Besides this methodological problem, the very essence of the roots of Indian nationalism itself remains a problematic endeavour, which emboldened many regional/ marginalized voices to come out with its own way of contesting the 'nationalism'. The anti-imperialist movement/nationalist movement finds its genesis in the inner/spiritual domain, which is bearing the essential marks of cultural identity.<sup>8</sup> This cultural identity remains a problematic social device. It represents the legitimate role played by the upper caste people particularly Brahmins in a highly hierarchized social system. This minority lot has had full control over economic, cultural, social and political institutions.

After indicating the essence of nationalist historiography and place of region, particularly in ideological terms, we shall probe into the anti-imperialist struggle and its various stages and equally successful mobilisation on the basis of linguistic identity of Tamil society.

### **Anti-imperialist Struggle in Colonial Tamil Society:**

In the early decades of this century, Tamil society<sup>9</sup> witnessed two significant process of mobilisation. First of all, like other parts of the subcontinent, people in Tamil society, were mobilised to oust the British Imperialism from the subcontinent. The anti-imperialist movement found its genesis in 18th century itself in Tamil society. The first of its kind was the

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<sup>8</sup> Chatterjee, Parth (1994), p.6. He further elaborates this understanding of the emergence of nationalism with reference to Bengal. See. P. 2-13.

<sup>9</sup> It refers to the erstwhile Madras Presidency. However, the Presidency includes many parts of Southern states. Therefore, referring only to Tamil society would be best fulfilling our task.

conflict between the Poligars<sup>10</sup> and the East Indian Company as early as in 1799 itself. Though a highly localised rebellion, it sent serious message to the East India Company that conquering the land would not be so easy. This becomes obvious from the words of one British collector:

I again repeated that.... Unless the Poligar were deprived of his power and my recommendations went to the fullest extent of the measure, the company's investment would be materially checked, the weavers residing in the Panchalankurichi Palayam would be stripped off their property and the largest part of the advances made to them by the commercial resident exposed to considerable danger<sup>11</sup>.

Such militant opposition to the British rule subsequently followed by many such incidents. One of the significant rebellions was the Vellore 'mutiny' in 1806. Within a short span of time, the British army could crush the agitation. Such rebellious incidents as opposition to the British rule indeed did not have a Pan-Indian vision. As it is pointed earlier, they were highly contextual. The Pan-Indian image for the anti-British rule was visible only after 1857, the First War of Independence. The first organised opposition to the British rule was with the founding of Madras Mahajana Sabha in 1884 one-year prior to the emergence of Indian National Congress<sup>12</sup>. It can be considered as the provincial forerunner of the Congress; the sabha sent delegates to the first session of Congress in Bombay in 1885. And it merged with the Congress in 1895.

Actually the first attempt was made to articulate and ventilate the nationalist aspirations; it was Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty in the name of

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<sup>10</sup> The Tamil version is Palayakkarargal whose system had evolved with the extension of Vijayanagar rule into Tamil Society. Each Poligar was the holder of a territory or Palayam (consisting of few villages ) granted to him in return for military service and tribute.

<sup>11</sup> N. Rajendran, 1994, The National Movement in Tamilnadu, 1905-14, OUP, Madras, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> David Arnold : 1977, The Congress in Tamilnadu, Manohar, Delhi, p.17.

Madras Native Association (MNA) in 1840s. It collapsed after the demise of Gazulu in 1868.<sup>13</sup> The fundamental intention of MNA and its mouthpiece 'Crescent' was to advocate the Hindu cause. The mass conversion of lower labouring-class Hindus to Christianity appeared to have offended the caste Hindus--the founders of MNA. At the same time, there is no adequate validity to conclude that MNA was greatly interested in protecting the sanctity of the Hindu religion and usage. It seems the material cause had been the main driving force behind such a move. If the conversion had not been banned, the lower labouring-class, then, would be going out of the control of local landlords<sup>14</sup>.

### **The Early Decades Of This Century...**

Ever since the Indian National Congress came into being in 1885, opposition of Nationalist type of the British rule got themselves consolidated. As Congress progressed further by spreading its tentacles into various parts of the subcontinent, various regionalized opposition to British rule disappeared/submerged with the Congress. This process got accelerated with the arrival of M.K. Gandhi in 1917 after he got back from South Africa where he successfully organised agitations against the apartheid. His amazing mobilising techniques resurrected public opinion against British rule. The nature, scope and politics involved in his mobilisation devices are indeed serious matter for cautious scrutiny. However, the point of discussion does not warrant such a

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<sup>13</sup> Sundarajan, Saroja : 1997 : Madras Presidency in Pre-Gandhian Era 1884-1915, Lalitha Publications, Pondicherry, p.38. Moreover, there was in 1830s itself an organisation to nurture the public opinions in Madras Presidency against British Rule, it was called Madras Hindu Literary Society with K.V. Lakshmaniah as President and V. Sriniviah as secretary, *ibid*, p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Chandrasekar, S.: 1995, Colonialism, Conflict and Nationalism, South India 1857-1947, p.31, Wishwa Prakashan, Bangalore. See also R.L. Hardgrave, 1965.

discourse, which in itself is an arduous task. Nevertheless, the point here is to understand how far the congress type 'Nationalism' found its base in Tamil society.

Exactly at a time when Gandhi entered active politics, Congress Party was virtually divided into two groups. As the Pan-Indian scenario of the organisation, in the Madras Presidency too, it was informally functioning as moderate and extremist groups. The moderate group consisted of people from the peak of Brahmin middle-class and represented similar political orientation in all their pursuits. Lawyers for the most part, had deeply imbibed the cultural and political values of the British but without abdicating the social ascendancy they enjoyed in Hindu society<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, the extremist group consisted of both Brahmins and non-Brahmins, who were eventually forced to look outward for support; they explored new political territory--vernacular oratory and journalism, militant Hinduism and to a lesser degree terrorism<sup>16</sup>. In the long run the latter group did not find much support from people. Thus the era of Gandhian legacy under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari, a Brahmin stalwart of congress party and a trusted lieutenant of Gandhi, began to consolidate itself in terms of Gandhi's programmes--the non-cooperation, civil disobedience as well as the Quit India movement. Consequently Congress type 'nationalism' became the most legitimate form of one's expression of anti-British feeling. Thus, it managed to regain power in the Presidency in 1937 and after independence too.

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<sup>15</sup> Arnold : 1977; p.21.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.26.

In this context, another process of mobilisation was taking place based on the `national' identity of Tamils --the Dravidian movement. It is realised, beyond doubt and ambiguity, that the Dravidian movement with its Tamil nationalistic aspirations remains the fundamental basis for the construction of modern Tamil society. The pan-Indian identity encompasses various nationalities in this subcontinent. The Congress, which represented the pan-Indian identity against the British rule, had pro-elite view. However, many regional / national movements had anti-Brahmin and pro-masses view.

### **Dravidian Movement: A Conceptual Clarification.**

Broadly speaking the movement has received three types of interpretations: 1) Anti-caste reform movement, 2) Tamil Nationalist Movement and 3) Dravidian Racial Movement. Contrary to the popular perception that the core of the movement-- Non-Brahmin identity--did not emerge along with the genesis of the movement in early decades of this century. This idea can be traced back in the 19th century Tamilnadu. Iyothidoss Pandithar, pioneering Dalit intellectual, organised Dalits in the name of Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1881, which had its first conference in December 1, 1881. Along with many resolutions, urging the Imperial Government, the primary focus was to force the government to refer to the `pariah'-Dalit community as "*Poorva Tamizhar*"<sup>17</sup> (early Tamils).

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<sup>17</sup> V. Geetha, S.V. Rajadurai : 1993, 'Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamilnadu', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXVIII, No, 39, pp. 2091-98.

The point to be noted here is that the construction of Tamil consciousness as an alternative national identity to the so-called congress type national identity construction which is predominantly an upper caste view of building up India. Iyothi Doss says, in his weekly called *Orupaisa Tamilan* later changed into just *Tamilan*, that Pariahs are the original Tamils and their religion is Buddhism, they were degraded and their culture was systematically destroyed when Aryan invaders from North (he calls them Arya melechas) imposed their rule on the original Tamils. For him, the historical development in Tamil country (and the subcontinent as a whole) followed a pattern in which was visible the steady and gradual decline of Buddhism and the way of life it enjoyed and their substitution, through the use of deception and cunning by Brahminical Hinduism. He elaborately talks of his attempts to deconstructing the Brahminical construction of India's identity. He also argues that the so-called 'vedic culture' and the pride of Indian civilisation were nothing but the construction of western orientalist. He observed that neither Ramanuja nor Sankara or Madhva had worked to bring together the four Vedas into a cohesive and unified text.

He was highly critical of congress nationalist representative claims and their policy of 'reform along national lines'. He was not convinced of the immediate good of native self-government and found the British more acceptable than Brahmins. For him, 'self-government would be possible only when Brahmin cease to run away in fear on seeing a pariah and when pariah ceases to chase away Brahmins and throw cow dung at them when the latter enter the pariah quarters in the village; and harmony prevails between the two and they come together as brothers and when the Buddha Dharma is realised'.

There are other Dalit intellectuals like Masilamani, Maduraiar, and Appadurai who did share similar ideological position as that of Iyothi Doss. Maduraiar was extremely critical of Gandhi's characterisation of pariah as Harijans was but a continuation of an old tradition of refusing to acknowledge the distinctive religious and ethical orientation of pariah who are the original Buddhists. He criticised Gandhi for his role in the signing of the infamous Poona Pact and pointed out that on several occasion Gandhi had avoided coming to terms with the issue of pariah identity, which is why he attempted to reconcile the fact of their lowly status with his own belief in the varna system by resorting to neologism<sup>18</sup>.

The genesis and steady growth of Anti-Brahmin/Anti-caste consciousness in the due course of time received many interpretations and elaborations. In this context, the movement's nature was interpreted as a movement aiming to preserving the racial identity of Dravidians vis-à-vis Aryans. The accepted equivalent for race in Tamil is '*Inam*'. There have been extensive references about Tamil Inam in various Tamil literature ranging from Sangam era to the contemporary period<sup>19</sup>. However, the wider usage and political overtone of the term began to spread its tentacles when the term Dravidian Inam began with massive upsurge of Non-Brahmin movement particularly with the criticism of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy on the contemporary social condition at the time. It is quite obvious, beyond doubt and ambiguity, that Periyar wanted to refer to the movement as a one which aims to curb the 'domination of alien race Aryans and

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<sup>18</sup> See for details G. Aloysius : 1997 b.

<sup>19</sup> For details see, Pa. Kirusunan, Tamil Ilakkiyathil Tamil mozhi, Tamil Inam, Tamilnadu, Madras, 1984.



their descendants, the Brahmins. He rejected the identification on the basis of language: Tamil is a language, Dravidian is a race, he said, not everybody speaking Tamil was a Dravidian<sup>20</sup>. He posited a dichotomy between Jati and Inam; the proud Dravidian *Inam* has in Aryan perception became a Sudra Jati. Precisely, for Periyar, Dravidians had been subjected to racial, not cultural suppression by the Aryans/Brahmins who had tried to foist their language and social system on to them to erase their race consciousness.

By anti-Aryan/Brahmin advocacy, Periyar did not aim at replacing the former by the Dravidians. He was keen on equality for all. Periyar envisaged that the movement was an anti-Aryan/racial one. He is of the opinion that, if we tend to change the content of the movement as cultural/linguistic identity based one, certainly the descendants of Aryans--the Brahmins would claim that they are also Tamils. Thus, there is no possibility of altering the prevailing unequal system<sup>21</sup>. This understanding of Periyar is deeply rooted in the premise that all the four southern states are basically the homeland of Dravidians. The languages of south - Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu emerged due to geographical and environmental differences but all these languages basically came out from one source; the differences caused separation but they are all one; which is the language of Dravidians<sup>22</sup>. There has always been serious criticism against this particular stand of Periyar vis-à-vis Tamil and its celebrated antiquity. It is quite obvious in Periyar's basic concern that annihilating caste

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<sup>20</sup> Ve. Anaimuthu : 1974 , Periyar E.Va. Ra. Sinthanaigal, Trichirappalli, p.548.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pp. 618.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 620.

inequalities is his primary task for the redemption of Tamil society. He believes this process would be possible and completed.

Periyar's interest in establishing the movement truly as a mission to make the Dravidian race-Innam with self-respect and modern progressive in thinking. At the same time, it shows us certain things very clearly. First of all, the historical naivety in realising and conceptualising the problem of contemporary Tamil society. The concept 'Dravidian' is a Sanskrit word denoting the dwellers of southern region. It is basically a linguistic category. In the Sanskrit literature of North India, there are a number of references to the population of south India as Dravida. In modern times, this word was applied for the first time by Caldwell to a group of languages, spoken mainly in the peninsula--its four chief tongues being Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada<sup>23</sup>. Ethnologists like Gustav Opert, Herbert Risley borrowed the term and applied it to a certain ethnic type, which they found in different parts of India, but in highest concentration in the peninsula. Soon the term 'Aryan' and Dravidian came to be used in linguistic as well as racial and cultural contexts<sup>24</sup>. Further, Caldwell held the supposition that the Dravidian race was 'diffused at an early period through the greater part of India'<sup>25</sup>. Out of this supposition they developed the view that the Dravidians occupied the north of India as well, and later driven out and down into south by the invading Aryans<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Caldwell R. *A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages*, pp. 4-7, London, Trubner.

<sup>24</sup> Nambi Arooran : 1980, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism*, Koodal Publication, Madurai, p.33.

<sup>25</sup> Caldwell, op cit., p.40.

<sup>26</sup> There are some scholars who do not endorse this view. They claim that Dravidians were the natives of south India only. See, Christopher Von Furer - Haimendorf 1953, *Tamil culture II*, p. 127-135

M. Arokiaswami, 1953, *Tamil culture II*, pp. 334-39.

Though Periyar held the supposition that Dravidian is a racial category in the beginning of his political campaign, there is no doubt that some amount of confusion prevailed among the leaders of Dravidian movement as to how to characterise the movement. This confusion might have misled Periyar to take up a very naïve position in this case. It is necessary to note here, as Periyar himself notes, that he was not trained as a sociologist or a historian. " I did not learn anything in school since the age of 10. And no more book knowledge as well. I do my duty within my limited knowledge by taking up very objective stand and interacting with scholars<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, Periyar never refused to acknowledge the changing circumstances and validity. In later periods Periyar held a different view--conforming to the essence and spirit of Dravidianism. " There is virtually no difference between two demands such as Tamilnadu for Tamils and Dravidanadu for Dravidians". He elaborates this stand in his interview to a daily, *Madras Mail* on 20.11.39 by saying that Tamilnadu and Dravidanadu are one and the same. "Dravidanadu is basically referred to Tamilnadu by many historians"<sup>28</sup>. He began to write vehemently in his daily *Kudi Arasu* as to there is no difference between Tamilnadu, Dravidam and Madras Presidency. " Since scholars and researchers have confirmed that Tamil is the mother of all Dravidian languages, the demand 'Tamilnadu for Tamils' is applicable to all these people"<sup>29</sup>.

In spite of Periyar's commitment to the emancipation of Non-Brahmin Tamils or Dravidians, there has been severe inconsistency in his conceptualisation. In the beginning, he employed the term 'Dravidam' to refer to the Tamils and their language and its antiquity, then he used it, during the anti-

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<sup>27</sup> Periyar, *Kudi Arasu*, 25.12, 1927, in S.V. Rajadurai & G. Geetha, op. Cit.

Hindi agitation in late 1930s as a reference to Tamil nationalism. Later, having realised the changes in the political arena, he identified it as geographical extension of whole Madras Presidency including Tamil territory. Then, he used it to denote the people who are victims of Aryan-Brahmin hegemony. Therefore, there is no scientific usage of Dravidam in Periyar's political discourse<sup>30</sup>.

This fragile understanding and usage of chief reformer of the unequal society, began to receive severe criticism later. Since 1980s particularly after 1983 massive violence unleashed by Sinhalese with the help of its military on Tamils in Sri Lanka, different voices begin to emerge asserting the ethnic-linguist identity of Tamils. Guna observes, Periyar's commitment to employ the term Dravidian including all the southern states, was just an attempt to dilute the nationalist sentiments of Tamils. Because, Periyar was always conscious of his mother tongue (Kannada) which emboldened him to denounce Tamil as a barbaric language; Guna further explores the historical naivety in the construction of Dravidian itself. Few of his main arguments are quite valid as well as strong .

- There were significant incidents of invasion by North Indian kings of south India (Aryan to Dravidians in Periyar's terminology) before Malik Kafoor in 13th century A.D. Similarly Tamil kings conquered northern parts.
- Aryan and Brahmin are two different concepts. The primary source of Brahminism--Text of Manu--was not authored or was not presented in the Aryan kings' court. It was done in Pulikesi II' s court

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<sup>28</sup> S.V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha, op. Cit., p.690.

<sup>29</sup> Ve. Anaimuthu, op. Cit., pp. 695.

<sup>30</sup> S.V.Rajadurai & S. Geetha, op. Cit. Pp. 714.

who was a king of Chalukya empire--which is now called the state of Karnataka <sup>31</sup>.

Thus he advocates ethnic-linguistic Tamil nationalism as viable and genuine alternative to the construction of Dravidian nationalism.

The point to be noted here is that whether Periyar held a very dubious position in this regard or his opponents of Tamil nationalist variety have strong and valid stand, basically the movement was a nationalist one based on the ethnic-linguistic identity of Tamils. However, this nationalism not simply an alternative to pan-Indian nationalism viz., one language, one religion, one nation--Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan. But Tamil nationalism inherits an alternative progressive model--advocating the primacy of Tamil and discrediting the most inhumane human invention--caste and its legitimising agency religion-- Aryan Hinduism.

Thus, Tamil nationalism inherently carries the spirit of anti-caste sentiments. One of the reasons for this base is the postulated utopia of a Tamilnadu or independent Tamil nation. This utopia drew its inspiration from the often-celebrated golden era of Sangam period where the native Tamils (non-Brahmins) did have division of labour on the basis of age and sex, never had explicitly or implicitly the roots of casteism. The invasion of Aryan--Brahmins dismantled gradually this structure and imposed the caste sanctions and declared the Tamils as Sudras<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, the futuristic view of the leaders projected the glorious past of Sangam period. This anti-caste, anti-religious, atheistic, radical

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<sup>31</sup> Guna, 1994, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Ve. Anaimuthu, op. Cit., pp. 348.

content intrinsically found in Tamil nationalism provides an altogether different frame of reference to work on . This uniqueness or what we can call the differentia specifica of Tamil society attracted the attention of many scholars and perhaps, still remains a great source of inspiration for many such works. Besides these celebrated works, it also provided an adequate space for conducive social milieu for the rise of special type of leadership-- charismatic.

Among the four southern states only in Andhra Pradesh and that too for a short period, such leadership emerged as illustrated by N.T. Rama Rao later. In Tamilnadu, there has been a long tradition of charismatic leadership. This charismatic leadership became a theme of many intellectual/scholarly works. However, the available scholarly literature is not taking cognisance of the complexities of the above noted uniqueness/differentia specifica.

Having realised the importance of the uniqueness/differentia specifica it is very pertinent to understand how the available scholarly literature look at the leadership issue. It is quite evident from the works on Tamil nationalism and its various stages and dimensions, were seriously concerned about the leadership issue. Nevertheless, some serious questions arise as to how the prevailing literature have looked into this issue.

Invariably all who worked on the leadership issue in Tamil nationalism intended to adopt similar view. Their perception in the superficial level seems to be valid. In fact, while probing further into the context and the modus operandi of these scholars we would be able to get totally different picture. The perception focuses primarily on the apparently close connection between the leaders and the cinema field.

It is very true that Tamil society, in the recent times, is known for its overwhelming presence in cinema. This overwhelming presence has surprised many actually, to be in Sara Dickey's words,

"movies are not only watched, they also constitute a pervasive visual and aural presence outside of the theatre. Huge, dazzling posters line the main street and smaller posters are slapped onto spare wall space. Movie songs blare from horn speakers on the cassette players at weddings, puberty rites and temple and shrine festivals. Coffee stalls play tapes of movie dialogues. Rickshaws and shop boards are painted with movie star's pictures"<sup>33</sup>.

Cinema, to a great extent penetrated into the everyday language of the people themselves. This is as a result of massive growth of cinema industry. The film industry of Tamilnadu as anywhere else in the behaviour--film memories, lore and gossip about the stars and fan adoration. This folk culture of cinema mirrors not only the glamour and sensation of the movies but provides a view of a society's values and aspirations. Thus, the cinema becomes a projective stimulus to which the audience responds<sup>34</sup>.

With massive effort for electrification in the rural side, the rise of cinema theatres have been on ascending line; thus, approximately 150 films per year with 2220 cinema hall all over the state. Therefore, there is no doubt that cinema does play a very important role in the cultural behaviour of people in Tamilnadu. Very significant manifestation of this behaviour is the fan clubs. These clubs of many

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<sup>33</sup> Sara Dickey : 1995, Consuming Modernity, p. 131, University of Minnesota.

<sup>34</sup> Hardgrave : 1979, p. 93.

actors often conduct function in the locality to mark some auspicious day, to mark the birthday of their beloved actor.

This overwhelming presence has given considerable amount of illusion to those who have worked on Tamil politics, particularly on the leadership issue to rush for a conclusion that cinema creates personality cult which facilitates those persons to become leaders in the long run. For this conclusion, they tend to cite many incidents with much elaboration. Before pointing out the lacuna and historical inadequacies in their elaborations, let us probe into them in advance.

All those who worked on this area, tend to focus on this apparent relation between cinema and the emergence of leadership issue. It is true that many top leaders of the Tamil nationalist Dravidian movement utilised cinema successfully for political propaganda. And it is quite true that the founders of Dravida Munnatra Kazhagam (D.M.K.), an offshoot of Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.), such as C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, 'Sivaji' Ganesan, K.R. Ramasamy, N.S. Krishnan, and later few more cinema artists joined them. These people's association was either in the name of scriptwriters and actors playing the lead role. Among them, Ganesan alone left this movement and joined Congress under the leadership of Kamaraj during 1960s. These leaders had understood the power of cinema to reach out to so many people within a short period. In fact Daniel Lerner has said in late 1950s itself about the power of cinema and emphasised the potential of cinema in the process of modernisation. 'Where the impact of movies has been massive and sustained, as in modern Lebanon, the results are highly visible. The movies teach new desires and new satisfactions.



They portray roles in which richer lives are lived and provide clues as to how these roles can be enacted by others<sup>35</sup>.

Besides small time participation in the drama company in the beginning Annadurai and Karunanidhi are appreciated for their very provocative dialogue and script. All their dialogues and scripts primarily targeted the unequal social system, casteism and its religious sanctions. Among many such movies, 'veelaikkari' (the maid servant), scripted by Annadurai, released in 1949, criticising very strongly the feudal system and exploitation 'made it clear that the greed and avarice of the rich did not pay in the long run. Some of the elementary principles of socialism stressed that we should depend upon our own labour for our progress and well being and not some unknown factor<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, another movie --few years later scripted by M. Karunanidhi-- entitled 'Parasakthi' released in 1952 criticised the role played by religion and vanguards of Hindu creeds -- the Brahmins (the priest). It stunned the Tamil audience. Although an earlier version in drama form was banned with its release as a movie it became an enormous box office success. "This movie was designed to create havoc. Of course it did. We were challenging the social law itself, the basic constitution (*of India*) itself", says the director of the film (emphasis mine).

The earlier Tamil movies were predominantly mythological in their content. With the rise of strong dissent to the mythical worldview, superstitions and caste inequality, Tamil movies immediately infused with radical content. It does not mean that all the movies released after 1950s were primarily radical in

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<sup>35</sup>.Lerner quoted in Hardgrave & Neidhart, Economic & Political Weekly, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> C.N. Annadurai in an interview in Filmfare, May 10, 1968, p. 45.

their content. But the point to be noted is that all those who have actively participated and aligned with such radical message shot up to the level of cinema artists and to political leaders. Those later shifted their loyalty to status-quo politics, failed to do so<sup>37</sup>.

Therefore, it becomes very clear, the radical content with strong appeal for Tamil nationalist politics enhanced the status of these people from cinema artists to political leaders. At the same time, it may be noted here that even if they had not done such a job in films, they would have certainly become leaders. The emergence of Tamil nationalism and its radical contents cannot be, in any way, simply reduced to the growth of film industry alone. However, it is true that cinema did facilitate the process. But the existing scholarly literature tend to portray them as mere cinema artists and by virtue of their role and dialogue writing managed to get electoral and political success. They tend to reduce everything perhaps unwittingly to film.

Robert L. Hardgrave who worked extensively on Tamil politics and society to a great extent endorsed this common-sense perception. He focuses on cinema predominantly for these people to become leaders of the nationalist parties. While asserting and acknowledging the relation between Dravidian movement and film industry he also adds "... its (cinema) effect and penetration may be measured in the spectacular rise of DMK and its landslide victory in Tamilnadu in the 1967 election<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, all the top leaders of the newly

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Hardgrave : 'Politics & Film in Tamilnadu', *Asian Survey*, p. 292.

<sup>38</sup> 'Sivaji' Ganesan is an ideal example of this case. In early 1960s, he joined Congress under the leadership of Kamaraj. He became very critical of Tamil nationalist politics. It reflected in his film role preferences. Though he is still regarded as one of the greatest actors in the country, with good number of admirers, he failed to convert their support into vote which manifested in his

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founded DMK., particularly Annadurai, Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran (henceforth MGR) till that moment were close associates of Periyar. But Hardgrave does not seem to be recognising them primarily as leaders. "In 1949 C.N. Annadurai, a film writer, broke with EVR to form a new party, the DMK. Among those joining Annadurai were a number of Tamil film stars including K.R. Ramasamy, S.S. Rajendran and Shivaji Ganesan who later left DMK for congress only to be replaced by MGR". He conducted a survey to find out "the rise of questioning the role which films and film stars played in the DMK victory in Tamilnadu, the broader problem of the relationship of media-participation to political consciousness must also be considered"<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, he did a survey covering major cities of Tamilnadu. Exactly 1000 people were randomly selected. His findings would further surprise us as the survey was conducted (in 1969) when DMK came to power in the state for the first time. It was undoubtedly the peak of Tamil nationalist politics. He concludes :

"The survey results confirm a close relationship between favour for MGR and support for the DMK. Star preference, we found, has the highest predictive value of any invariable in determining party vote. Our statistics, however, do not indicate the direction of causality. It is highly probable, nevertheless, that the dominance of MGR in the Tamil films, was a vital ingredient in DMK's rise to power and a powerful testament to the influence of film in society"<sup>40</sup>.

In his other works also he makes similar comments, particularly on the rise of MGR as a leader<sup>41</sup>. Among the top leaders of the movement MGR in the recent

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electoral defeat as President of 'Tamilaga Makkal Munnani' (Tamil Peoples Front) in 1989 assembly elections.

<sup>39</sup> Hardgrave Neidhart : op. Cit., p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.: p.34

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

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times, received considerable amount of attention from the scholars. These scholars also adopt the same technique in identifying him as a leader.

"MGR was an extremely popular Tamil movie actor. He had carefully cultivated his image as a Good Samaritan. He played the hero in many Tamil movies, in which he would end up saving women, the poor and the oppressed from various evil elements of society. His image as a hero of the common folk fit well into the DMK's populist orientation and he often appeared beside Annadurai during political campaign. As a result, MGR's popularity as a movie hero was gradually transferred to MGR as a political leader. Slowly but surely he came to be widely perceived as a man of the people both on and off the screen"

says Atul Kohli <sup>42</sup>. Clearly, it indicates that MGR has been perceived as a different type of leader. Particularly those who come from regions less influenced by cinema in India, tend to believe that it is the power of cinema which enhanced the status of an actor to leader.

This understanding is predominant in Sara Dickey's view of Tamil politics also which is based on her field work in Madurai city. First of all, her basic premise on which her views of political system and leadership are built up, forces us to keep her views under litmus tests. The most important are the person-centred aspects of Indian political leadership, the patronage system prevalent in India and the structure of party politics in Tamilnadu. The political 'personality' in this formulation is someone who inspires votes not because of political record, stands on issues, or even communal affiliation, but because of popularity based on personal attractiveness<sup>43</sup>. Perhaps, being an outsider these things would

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<sup>42</sup> Kohli: (1989), Democracy and its Discontent. See for details, Hardgrave :1)' Politics and film in Tamilnadu' : Asian survey

2) 'MGR as celluloid God ': South Asian Review

3) 'When stars displace the God : The folkculture of cinema in Tamilnadu' : Essays on political sociology of south India.

<sup>43</sup> Sara Dickey : 1993 , p.349

appear very surprising. Nevertheless, she is, as an anthropologist, expected to go beyond the apparent and superficial impression about this type of political system. Her bias appears vividly when she tends to compare this type of system with 'more developed' societies view of politics. 'The appeal of "personality" is part of general emphasis in Tamilnadu and probably much of India on a person-centred politics--as opposed to, for example, the politics of "issues" for which North Americans pronounce a preference'<sup>44</sup>. She strongly postulates that politics, in Tamilnadu, is unambiguously, the product of cinema. 'Cinema both creates and preserves the widely publicised, dynamic and attractive images so valuable in person-centred politics'. She further adds, 'cinema is also useful to actors who aspire to politics because of the political and cultural importance attached to charity or patronage'.

Having drawn her inspiration from Brass on contemporary leaders, she endorses his view on contemporary leaders as having a duty to care for the material interests of their followers. Subsequently, she links it with cinema. 'Cinema plays a role in patronage, because it can show a politician giving favours to people who are like members of the audience'. Thus, for her, cinema could bring in massive changes in the political system. 'Cinema links the image of beauty and the presentations of wealth, factors in electoral success, by both advertising the person and amplifying the effects of the laudable deeds'. All such arguments were utilised by her to study the phenomenal success of MGR since he left DMK and established his own party. Her observations in her field study among fan-club members could strengthen her arguments. 'Fans knew that MGR

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.350.

was what they saw in the movies, and accepted the movie image as the real person. Poor and uneducated voters especially saw MGR as their hero. Unlike most film stars, MGR was perceived as some one who not only understood and cared about the problems of the working class, but also possessed the necessary power to attack and solve those problems'. She elaborates how the fan clubs function in political terms, the perception of fan club leaders to the problems people face and their solution to it<sup>45</sup>.

The ultimate in this genre is the work by M.S.S. Pandian; his full length work on MGR (*The Image Trap: M.G.Ramachandran in Film & Politics*) would tell us elaborately the cautious effort taken by MGR to project his image as almost the replica of God and how does it fit well in the minds of the people. Drawing his inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's category of common sense, the author looks into the whole MGR phenomena. Thus, his long essay deals with how dominant ideologies succeed in this terrain of struggle and produce consent among the subaltern classes. This process, he illustrates, by exploring the screen image of MGR and its embeddedness and insertion in the pre-existing common sense of the subaltern classes in Tamilnadu. His extensive account on the effort made by MGR to project his image as messiah of poor and liberator of women from their problems unleashed by patriarchy in his films were consistently juxtaposed by Pandian vis-à-vis his personal life and in politics. How did he

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<sup>45</sup> See for details: Sara Dickey, (1993) Cinema and Urban Poor in South India: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

project something to deceive people/followers/fans and maintained totally contradictory life and politics. This elaboration runs through the whole book<sup>46</sup>.

From all the above delineated arguments, we can draw some corollaries as to what extent cinema could influence the political systems and emergence of cinema is basically a visual medium and an universal one. No part of the globe is left without the presence, and to some extent, influence of cinema. Movies are made in different languages around the world based on the cultural ethos of that particular community. Even within India, every year few hundred movies are released. Surprisingly, character formation, narration of the story, the importance of role played by hero are almost similar in many of these Indian movies. If we go by the logic pursued by these scholars, in all these states and linguistic regions emergence of such personality cult should have emerged as consistently as in the case of Tamilnadu. Nothing of this kind emerged in any part of India. However, similar efforts have been made in other southern states - Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Prem Nazir of Kerala and Rajkumar of Karnataka were very popular heroes. Despite their popularity they could not make it to the political arena. Even for their failures, image on the screen was projected as main reason.

'Here the difficulty lies in his (Rajkumar's) image which is more suitably heroic than Prem Nazir's', says Sara Dickey. She further adds, 'Karnataka has the smallest number of cinema houses per capita of all the southern states' and regarding, Kerala' it has relatively high levels of education for both women and

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<sup>46</sup> M.S.S. Pandian : 1992 : The Image Trap : M.G. Ramachandran in film and politics, Sage Publication, New Delhi, pp. 33-143.

men, high standard of living, religious diversity and Marxist political orientation' and hence the non-emergence of cinema actors as political leaders.<sup>47</sup>

This tells us without ambiguity her excessive belief in cinema and its power even in creating leaders in Tamilnadu. Drawing almost similar line of argument, Pandian also reaches the same conclusion. It is extremely pertinent to pose a question here as to why did only in Tamilnadu, people from subaltern classes, by virtue of their fragmented common sense' find cinema actors as the best leaders? Is the fragmented nature of common sense of subaltern classes found only in Tamil society? Why not in other states, particularly in other southern states? A sweeping conclusion is that the fans/followers believe that what they see on the screen is the real MGR and not his image. However, his own interview given at the end of the essay, with the follower of MGR, unfolds the fact<sup>48</sup>.

*REPORTER: In films, whatever, he (MGR) finds out (the truth) and beats up...*

*AIADMK: That is entertainment. Don't mix up things.*

It seems to be clear that people changed their loyalties to leaders and the latter utilised film successfully for propaganda, for inculcating some deeper meanings. Though cinema is an universal phenomenon, it's language has always been rooted in particular context. This basic understanding is conspicuously missing in the above-cited works. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the reasons for the genesis of person-centred politics viz., charismatic leadership in modern social milieu of Tamilnadu.

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<sup>47</sup> Sara Dickey : op. Cit., p. 349.

<sup>48</sup> M.S.S. Pandian : op., cit., p. 144.



Having realised the importance of context, in the coming chapters we would be dealing with some of its specificities. The next chapter would deal with certain conceptual clarifications associated with the concept charisma. In the same chapter, we would be describing a few charismatic leaders and the attributes of their charismatic appeal. Thus, the subsequent chapters would seek to explain as to under what circumstances these attributes would become functional. In this study, the social configuration of Tamil society during the colonial period would be analysed first, as it offered a conducive ambience for the emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness. Then, the role of language would be studied as it remained as the national identity of the native Tamils.

*Chapter Two*

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## CHARISMA: A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Before embarking upon to contextualize charismatic leadership, in this chapter we shall explore the conceptual design of the concept called charisma itself. It was Weber, who first gave an elaborate scholarly account of charisma. Charismatic leadership is one of the most creatively compelling ideal typical tool in Weber's very extensive conceptual arsenal. In formulating the construct of "charisma" Weber drew upon historical examples of known leaders and then attempted to elaborate a definite set of characteristic relations prevailing between those leaders and their followers. Having drawn his inspiration for this construction from Rudolph Sohm, who coined the term with the meaning 'the gift of grace, the possession of pneuma by a religiously inspired individual'<sup>1</sup>, Weber goes further ahead with significant reformulation. Weber gives great emphasis not on the possession of grace itself, but on the 'belief' by the followers of such a religious leader and by the leader himself of such possession<sup>2</sup>. He then writes, 'the term charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least' specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader". In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of quality is

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<sup>1</sup> P. Haley: 1980, Rudolph Sohm on Charisma, *Journal of Religion*, vol. 60, no. 2, April.

<sup>2</sup> Glassman and Swatos (Ed.): 1986, Charisma, History and Structure, Greenwood Press, New York, p. 32.

thought of as resting on magical powers, whether of prophets, persons with reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in the hunt or heroes in war.... what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority by his "followers" or "disciples"<sup>3</sup>.

Though Weber mentions the concept "charisma" in his work Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism--his specialised sociological treatise of religion--his most exhaustive analysis of charisma appears in Economy and Society. Here he offers an elaborate account on charisma. Time and again he insists that 'charisma is indeed the specifically creative revolutionary force of history', that it, 'transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms'<sup>4</sup>. Though Weber still offers examples of charismatic elements in stable social orders (as his discussions of the charisma of lineage, of office and of kingship) and argues that after it has receded as a 'creative force', 'charisma remains a very important element of social structure' legitimising the existing social order<sup>5</sup>, he simultaneously emphasises that in such cases 'pure' charisma has been lost<sup>6</sup>.

In fact pure charisma not only claims extraordinary powers, but occurs in extraordinary situations and leads at least temporarily to actions, movements,

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<sup>3</sup> Max Weber: 1947, The Theory of Social and Economic Change, William Hodge and Company, London, p.. Substantial work on Weber began with an introduction to his work by Talcott Parsons in The Structure of Social Action, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1949), Chapters 14-17. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, "From Max Weber": Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946) and translated by A.M. Henderson and (Talcott Parsons) Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1960), presents an excellent summary of Webers' ideas.

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber: 1968, Economy and Society, G. Roth, and C. Wittich (ed.), Bedminster, New York, pp. 1115-1117.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. : p. 1146.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. : P. 1121-22.

events, organisations which are extraordinary, not routine and outside the sphere of everyday life<sup>7</sup>.

This categorisations has emerged in Weber's analysis, precisely because, he juxtaposed charisma vis-à-vis other types of legitimate domination--rational-legal and traditional. Weber saw legal and traditional domination as permanent structures that provide for the everyday needs of the community. Such structures are not well adapted to the satisfaction of needs that are out of the ordinary. Hence, in times of troubles the 'natural' leader is neither the official nor the master whose authority is based on the sanctity of tradition, but the man who is believed to possess extraordinary gifts of body and mind<sup>8</sup>.

Before entering into a discussion on the emergence/sources of charisma, it is necessary to explore the distinction between authority and power. Weber attributed 'authority' to a charismatic leader, because, 'legitimacy' and 'sanctions' are attached to the office the leader occupies. If we go by the typology of Weber 'pure' charisma is not only operating in a non-institutional context, but it comes up against the prevailing institutional complex; thus, it becomes anti-institutional. Therefore, an ideal-typical charismatic leader does not have any 'authority'; he has power in that he is capable of influencing the behaviour of his followers<sup>9</sup>. Weber was actually wrong in referring to the power of charismatic leader as 'authority'. If we are to employ meaningfully the distinction between authority and power we can only speak of charismatic power or influence and not charismatic authority<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Glassman & Swastos: *ibid.* ; p.30.

<sup>8</sup> Weber: *Op. Cit.*, p. 1111-1112.

<sup>9</sup> T.K. Oommen: 1972, Charisma, Stability and Change, Thompson Press, New Delhi, p. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* : p.3.

Contrary to this understanding, Robert Bierstadt says, charismatic leader and authority are different things. A leader can only request, but authority can require. Leadership depends on the personal qualities of the leader in the situation in which he leads. In the case of authority, however, the relationship ceases to be personal and if the legitimacy of the authority is recognised the subordinate must obey the command even when is unacquainted with the person who issues it. In a leadership relation the person is basic; in authority relation the person is merely a symbol<sup>11</sup>.

The confusion arises precisely due to some leaders' elevation to the 'office'. Some leaders such as Nehru and Castro do have charisma, but still they either worked or are working within an institutional framework. Therefore, the question is which should be given primacy; either to their authority due to their position in the occupation of high office or their charismatic appeal before their elevation. This confusion emanates from the ambiguity found in Weber's language itself. His theorisation of pure charisma, at least appears to have given, some amount of compartmentalisation of three typologies. But when we explore deep into his typological abstraction, perhaps, we are in a position to grasp the intended meaning attributed by Weber. Since this typology is conceived as 'ideal types', and hence conceptual abstractions, Weber insisted that they are not empirical realities. In fact, Weber, having understood the complexities of modern social structure in various parts of the globe, goes to the extent of saying all these typologies might not be seen or realised in its pure form or isolation.

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<sup>11</sup> Bierstedt quoted in Reinhard Bendix: Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait 1977, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 298.

There is no watertight compartmentalisation of these types of authorities. Perhaps, we can say, these types of authorities, in the empirical situation, exist as mixed categories<sup>12</sup>. That is to say, as Oommen observes, 'there is no purely rational, traditional or charismatic "authority" while it is possible to label a given authority system as 'predominantly' rational, traditional or charismatic'<sup>13</sup>.

Subsequently, we need to explore as to what is the source of charisma. When this type of power or influence could as Weber articulated, though in its pure form, be overwhelming before other types of power systems such as traditional and rational-legal, it is thus necessary analyse further deep the context for the emergence of charisma. To Weber, charismatic are creative individuals who emerge from crisis situations and the ideas they propound and propose play an important role in the transformation of societies. These individuals may be philosophers, religious leaders, prophets or social reformers.

This understanding of Weber, subsequently, receives many criticisms and elaboration, as it has some serious lacuna. First of all charisma emerges from usually, if not necessarily, a critical situation. But there is no elaboration of such critical situation. To quote Oommen in this regard, '...he did not elaborate on the features of social structure which perpetuate and maintain the charismatic elements in a society'<sup>14</sup>. The critical condition alone would not be sufficient for the emergence of charismatic leadership. Logically speaking, no society in the

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<sup>12</sup> Max Weber: 1947, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, London, William Hodge & Co., p. 350-51.

<sup>13</sup> T.K. Oommen, op. Cit., p.4. In fact, Edward Shils also echoes similar view. To quote him, "In his analysis of the structure of religious, monarchical and feudal institutions, he dealt repeatedly with the coexistence of the charismatic and other types of personalities", See Edward Shils: 1965, Charisma, Order and Status, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 30, No.2, p. 199.

<sup>14</sup> T.K. Oommen, op. Cit., p. 10.

world is free from crisis and critical moments. But, there is no ready emergence of charismatic leaders in all societies around the globe. Therefore, certain specific conditions which pave the way for the charismatic to emerge need to be stipulated. Thus, 'critical situation' *per se*, would be highly inadequate while exploring this creative device of Weber.

Though his characterisation of charisma is highly contingent upon the material and social conditions, there is significant amount of ambiguity persists. Since Weber received his inspiration from the Old Testament for the concept charisma, it should not give any impression that the concept is metaphysical, which Weber did. Among the three typologies of Weber, only the Rational-legal authority has received significant amount of attention from sociologists. The other, traditional authority, has been by-passed largely because it has fallen within the purview of history and anthropology.

And charisma, for its apparent metaphysical tone has also been relegated to the back seat in conventional sociological works. In fact, Parsons contested this attitude very severely, 'charisma is not a metaphysical entity, but strictly an empirical observable quality of men and things in relation to human attitudes'<sup>15</sup>. Carl Friedrich<sup>16</sup>, however, argues for a restrictive interpretation of charisma. He points out that 'charismatic leadership was understood as leadership based on a transcendent call by a divine being in which both the person called and his followers believe; such leadership should properly be conceived as grounded in a faith in god or gods'<sup>17</sup>. He objects to Weber's broadening of the category to

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<sup>15</sup> Talcott Parsons, Op. Cit., pp. 668-669.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Friedrich: 1961, Political leadership and the problem of charismatic power, *The Journal of Politics*, 23, Feb., pp. 3-24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. : p. 7.



include secular and non-transcendental types of callings, inspirational type of some demagogic type, and says further that Hitler was representing a very different type of leadership than the founders of religion. The reason, for him, being is '... they (Hitler type leaders) fall in different categories, since the totalitarian leaders are preoccupied with power, especially organisational power, while the founders of religions are not'<sup>18</sup>.

Shils attempts to unfold the unity of religious and secular conceptions of charisma. He says, 'In Weber's usage, charisma is, in the first instance, a property of conduct and personality regarded by those who respond to it as a manifestation of endowment with, or possession by some divine power'. He takes a different stand, saying 'Weber did not insist that the person really be "possessed" or "endowed"; only that he be thought to be possessed or endowed with these qualities'<sup>19</sup>. Shils extends Weber's explanations further and gives new meaning to it. He is of the opinion that 'Weber did not restrict his usage of "charisma" to refer only to manifestations of divinity. He often used the term to refer to extraordinary individuals'. Here Shils says, 'it includes powerful, ascendant, persistent, effectively expressive personalities who impose themselves on their environment by their exceptional courage, decisiveness, self-confidence, fluency, insight, energy, etc., and who do not necessarily believe that they are working under divine inspiration'. He further adds, 'Weber used the term to refer to politicians, artists, scientists, soldiers and other occupations the incumbents of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. : p. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Shils, op. Cit., p. 200.

which nowadays think of themselves as having or are thought to have nothing to do with religion, in the conventional sense, in the performance of their roles<sup>20</sup>.

Though charisma, in Weber's language, seems to denote simply extraordinary power possessed by creative individuals who emerge from crisis situation, a closer scrutiny would reveal something else. That is, as Charles Camic observes, 'charisma' for Weber, is a generic label for attributions of specialness, or extraordinary power, to certain persons or objects. He further says, 'first, Weber does not question whether these attributions of specialness are all of one kind<sup>21</sup>. In other words, within the context of a single example of primitive magic, Weber's conceptual elaboration becomes quite problematic when attributions of specialness are identified in a variety of other contexts and then treated as if they were homologous to one another. Camic extends his criticism to Weber on another ground as well. He says, 'The fundamental connection Weber discerns here between extraordinary human needs and charisma has often been neglected, but is of immense empirical and theoretical significance<sup>22</sup>. However, just for these reasons, it is very naïve to discredit Weber's categorisation. In this regard, Shils examines the mechanisms of the charismatic phenomenon in secular societies and in the non-ecclesiastical institutions, which are conventionally viewed as entirely free of the charismatic element, except for the occasional disruptive tendencies, or transforming intrusion of the charismatic personalities', says Oommen<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. : p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Camic: 1980, Charisma: Its Varieties, Preconditions and Consequences ; *Sociological Inquiry*, 50, 1: pp. 5-23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. : p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> T.K. Oommen: op. Cit., p.4.

Friedland also holds similar position. His analysis of the emergence of charismatic leadership in Tanganyika shares such a perspective. He identifies three reasons for the emergence of charismatic leadership:

- i) the expressing of sentiments which had been inchoate in society but which had been brought to limelight only recently by a handful of people;
- ii) in expressing these sentiments, leaders were engaging in activities defined as hazardous by most people;
- iii) recognised evidence of 'success' in the activities undertaken by the leaders.

At the same time, he is of the opinion that while Weber clearly indicated a social dimension to charisma, he also stressed charisma as a 'psychological attribute of a person'<sup>24</sup>.

The point here is, Weber seems to have failed in identifying the attributes charismatic leaders. Because, Weber provided no clear statement or catalogue of personal qualities of charismatic leaders, which give rise to the special emotional bond with their followers. Further, he did not specify the property of the situation out of which charismatic leaders emerge.

In the modern period, perhaps, nationalism has been considered as one of the most powerful terrain, which became pivot or womb out of which charismatic leaders emerge. In other words, western social scientists have tended in the

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<sup>24</sup> William H. Friedland: 1964, For a Sociological Concept of Charisma, *Social Force*, 43: 18-27.

recent past to approach the phenomenon of charisma in the context of a study of modernisation and political development in ex-colonial, 'new states'. To quote Tucker:

The '... result is a functional theory of charisma, according to which charismatic leadership is essentially a fulcrum of the transition from colonial-ruled, traditional society to potentially independent modern society, and the Weberian typology is, in effect, historicized into a sequence that run from traditional through charismatic to rational-legal forms of authority'<sup>25</sup>.

The transformation of traditional system to modern (rational-legal) system of political and economic structure had to lean on the power of charismatic only as the colonial rule projected to be the mighty masters. 'Imperialism was a sentiment rather than a policy; its foundations were moral rather than intellectual'<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, colonialism is essentially an overwhelming, coercive effort to colonise the minds of the native people; '...it (colonialism) releases forces within the colonised societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all'<sup>27</sup>. In this case, the comprehensive perspective of Thomas E. Dow on African situation would reveal more insights. While narrating the independence movements in English colonial Africa, he observes, 'they contained a particular leader, or group of leaders one of whom eventually became ascendant, who introduced the "revolutionary mission", the new "obligations", which were willingly accepted as

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<sup>25</sup> Robert C. Tucker: 1968, *The Theory of Charismatic Leadership*, *Daedalus*, Summer, p. 734.

<sup>26</sup> Ashish Nandy: 1992, *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Discovery of Self*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* : p. 17.

"duties" by the followers because of their belief in the "supernatural, superhuman or... exceptional qualities" of the leader'.<sup>28</sup>

Dow elaborates further, with having full agreement with the conceptual framework of Weber in this regard: 'Africans, like any other human beings...no longer will allow anything to make them third or fourth class citizens in the country of their birth'<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the native people's realisation to have self-government by fighting against the colonizers becomes the most fundamental thriving force '... only by attaining self-government... can the people of this country think freely, talk freely and say whatever they want to say'<sup>30</sup>. 'My purpose is to articulate the natural aspirations of the people... can we be accused of asking too much when all we ask for is hope...that one day our country shall be democratic'<sup>31</sup>.

A closer and deep scrutiny of these leaders' language would give us new meaning of the freedom movement. Perhaps, an accurate description would be that these leaders went beyond specific tribal, economic, religious or regional interests. Their appeal was universal and affective; their claim to leadership personal and charismatic. They associated with neither colonial power nor tradition, but derived their legitimacy by breathing life into the dream of freedom and independence. Thus their claim to authority as their qualities are thought to be beyond ordinary men. As Dow observes, '...they are typical of Black Africa's political messiahs; they are charismatic leaders'<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas E. Dow: 1968, The role of Charisma in Modern African Development, *Social Force*, 46:328-338.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. : p. 329.

<sup>30</sup> Kwame Nkrumah as quoted in Dow : op. Cit. P. 330.

<sup>31</sup> Julius Nyerere as quoted in Dow : ibid.

<sup>32</sup> ibid. :p. 331-32.

In accordance with the Weberian thesis, the emergence of charismatic leadership would be merely one manifestation within the institutional system. Thus, it was predominantly a charismatic authority.

Similar conclusion can be drawn from Indian scenario as well. Indian subcontinent's response to colonial/British rule was unique by itself. The colonial rule had lasted well over two centuries. Though there was no homogeneity of perception regarding the nature of imperialism among the leaders of anti-imperialist movement, the method adopted by Mohandass K. Gandhi was widely acclaimed. He was neither a total believer/supporter of modernity/western rationalism and enlightenment ethos or of Hindu mythologies. He belonged to the critical tradition. His unique way of leading the struggle with novel attempts for registering their protest against the British rule drew from the traditions, but with critical look, not inward looking approach was widely acclaimed<sup>33</sup>. His deep understanding of Indian village structure made him very sensitive to community life; unlike many of his contemporaries, he found no distinction between politics and religion, '...my personal salvation requires a sacrifice of India's political salvation. It implies that the two go together'<sup>34</sup>. His unique way of fighting against the British by invoking traditional system of knowledge and symbols, instead of relying on the modern technique which again the West's invention; proved to be one of the greatest healing technique of the wound which the colonial rule had inflicted. In other words, the means he adopted with

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<sup>33</sup> Rudolph & Rudolph : Modernity of Tradition, Orient Longman, New Delhi, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 148.

appropriate cultural tone, to a great extent, ensured him to be the tallest, charismatic leader of anti-imperialist movement.

Precisely because of the complexities in locating the emergence of charismatic leadership, there is some amount of confusion as to who would be called as 'charismatic'. Ratnam asserts that 'a vivid personality is one of the necessary components, but not the only one. Similarly, popularity is also a very dubious category'.<sup>35</sup> Further, one of the very fundamental components of charismatic appeal is that, it is always liable for erosion. Therefore, giving a very rigid answer is not only possible but dangerous also. As Oommen has correctly pointed out, 'the attributes of charisma are not given forever, they are contextual'<sup>36</sup>.

An understanding of the attributes of charisma of Tamil nationalist leaders is useful at this juncture. Among the leaders of Tamil nationalist movement, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy comes first. He was born in a wealthy non-Brahmin family. He began his political carrier as a committed Congress man and a loyal follower of Gandhi. But, this persisted till 1924 only. In 1924, when his plea for community based reservation was rejected, in the annual conference of the Congress in Madras Presidency in Kanjeeपुरam, he walked out of the conference hall and left congress with a determination to dismantle the Brahmin oligarchy. He immediately launched "self-respect movement"<sup>37</sup>. He established it to restore the *suya mariyathai* (Self-Respect) of non-Brahmins which was obviously to have been denied to them by Brahmins. This movement's main

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<sup>35</sup> K.J. Ratnam, 1964, Charisma and Political Leadership, *Political Studies*, vol. 12, pp. 341-54.

<sup>36</sup> T.K. Oommen, op. Cit., p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Hardgrave, Robert L. : 1965, The Dravidian Movement, Popular Prakshan, Bombay, p. 26.

objective in the incipient years was to secure communal representation in all spheres of public life. But, subsequently, it confined its activities to social reform in which it aimed to give non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past, which also implied a denial of the superiority of the Brahmin and of their faith in the caste system or *Varnashrama Dharma*. This stand of Periyar gradually manifested against religion and faith in superstitions contrary to his parent's attempts to make him more and more religious by giving him the responsibility of administering the family temple. While he managed the temple efficiently never gained faith in religion<sup>38</sup>. In his biography, Periyar recounts his childhood incidents to show he opposed "superstitious" caste practices from an early age. One such incident is particularly pertinent:

I was sent to the village school when I was six years old. That school was little away from Erode town. Around the school were the houses of business Chettiars. They would be extracting oil there. Muslims used to make mats and baskets out of bamboo and they used to live huts around that place Hence all around my school were Chettiars, Vedakar, and Muslims. In those days, the other caste people would not eat anything in these people's houses. Hence, my people would not forget to tell me when I went to school. They would say : "we should not mix with those people. So do not drink water in their houses. If you want you can drink water in your teacher's house". Hence, Once or twice I asked for water in my teacher's house. The teacher was a Brahmin. In their house a little girl would put a brass tumbler on the floor, pour water in it and ask me to lift it up and drink. [This is not the way a Brahmin would give water to another Brahmin]. After I drank she would ask me to put it down, she would pour water inside, wash it and take it outside. Also, since I did not know how to lift it up and drink [He means without touching the rim of the cup with his lips. This is the way in which Brahmins drink liquids], a part of it would spill on my nose and body and only a part would go to the mouth. I would cough and spill even the water I would drink. That girl would get angry and scold me. Hence, if I was thirsty, I would not ask for water in my teacher's house<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Nambi Arooran : op. Cit., p. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Chitamparanar : 1939, Tamilar Talaiivar (Tamilian's leader) in Tamil, Kudi Arasu press, Erode.



During his initial stage of political activities as a Congressman, he mobilized the so-called lower-caste people and joined a satyagraha in Vaikom, Kerala, to open certain roads for them as they were denied this right since they were "untouchables". Finally, he succeeded in getting permission for the lower castes to use the road thus, he became widely known as "*Hero of Vaikom*" or "*Vaikkom Veerar*"<sup>40</sup>.

In another controversy also, Periyar showed his concern for the non-Brahmin cause. It was related to the segregation that was then being observed in dining between Brahmin and non-Brahmin students at the Seranmahadevi Gurukulam in Tinnevely District. The Gurukulam was founded in 1922 by V.V.S. Aiyar, a congress leader, to impart "high ideals of national education". Periyar vehemently criticized, as the Secretary of Provincial Congress Committee, the discrimination. The Brahmin -- non-Brahmin conflict within the party was on the increase, Periyar always stood by the non-Brahmins and their demands. Over this controversy, finally, Periyar left Congress on the grounds that Congress wanted to safeguard the interests and privileges of Brahmins<sup>41</sup>.

It, to a great extent, gave the people of Tamilnadu, a new hope that Periyar would always fight for justice. He, then, projected radical, atheistic views as an alternative. This understanding in later periods assumed more clear perspective. Particularly after his return from Soviet Union, he added a version of Marxism to the Dravidian ideology. An article entitled "What is our aim ?" he declared that "both Capitalism and Religion should be destroyed"<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Nambi Arooran : op. Cit., p. 155.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. : pp. 156-159.

<sup>42</sup> Kudi Arasu, May 11, 1933, Quoted in Barnett.

His vision for a just, equal society without any kind of exploitation and his absolute determinism to clinch those ideals, created a kind of admiration and deep respect for him from the non-Brahmin, native Tamils. This tireless crusader, *ipso facto* began to enjoy a great deal of celebrity.

Of course, at one point in time, he began to face an erosion in his appeal also. When he announced his marriage, at the age of 71, with a party worker who was just 29 year old, and named her as his new successor, many of his close associates and bulk of party's rank and file began to leave him. We can draw certain corollaries from his announcement; first of fall, it indicates Periyar's authoritarian approach to the party leadership. His autocratic control over the party was a major complaint of Annadurai and other junior leaders. In the announcement, he said :

'...as has been explained by me for the last four or five months in various public meetings, in my writings and in line with my talks with Achariyar (C.Rajagopalachari)... I have decided to make Maniammal with whom I have been in close association for the last five years or six years and who has also identified herself with my own interests and the interest of the movement, as my legal successor'<sup>43</sup>

It becomes quite obvious that Periyar states Rajaji, a Brahmin and former Premier of Madras Presidency and his political rival, as his reliable trusted friend than his own close party leaders. These moves of Periyar created considerable amount of disenchantment among the rank and file of the party and the general masses. These finally resulted in a sudden erosion of his charismatic appeal.

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<sup>43</sup> M. Parthasarathari : 1961, Ti Mu Kalaka Varalaru (History of DMK) in Tamil, Pari Nilayam, Madras.

This erosion and the gap was immediately filled by Periyar's chief lieutenant C.N. Annadurai, who broke away with Periyar in 1949. In the same year he established Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, (Dravidian Progressive Federation). Explicitly, there was no drastic change in DMK's ideological stand vis-à-vis DK. But still, 75 % of DK's rank and file left with Annadurai. This shows clearly, the appeal he enjoyed among the party workers. In fact, many party men held the opinion that Annadurai could achieve social reforms through the use of legislative measures. Many people just followed him for his dynamism. Annadurai was a talented writer, dramatist, actor and propagandist.

Perhaps, the best example of Annadurai's work as a propagandist is *Arya Mayai* (Aryan Illusion) written in 1943. It eventually became one of the key books stating the ideology of the movement. Even for non-members of Dravidian movements and organizations, 'Aryan Illusion' has become a minor classic in modern Tamil. In this book, he undertakes a thorough explication of the cultural foundations of the Dravidian movement. He was highly critical of the Puranas and other Hindu epics, and argues that Dravidian should not call themselves Hindus, because (among other reasons) 'we are not prepared to admit that the obscene anecdotes in the Puranas are the playful activities of our Gods'<sup>44</sup>.

Annadurai's ideological approach addresses itself to four concerns : 'description and statement of the nature of oppression; statement of reasons for the oppression; elaboration of an alternative, "the good society"; and, finally, suggestion of a programme and a call to action'<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> C.N. Annadurai : 1943, Ariya Mayai (Aryan Illusion) in Tamil, Dravidappani, Trichy, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. : pp. 26-28.

Fundamentally, there are some differences in the appeals of two leaders of one stream -- Periyar and Annadurai. Periyar's extreme radical stand, discrediting all aspects of religion and culture including language made him slightly incomprehensible for many laymen. Whereas Annadurai's appeal was with appropriate cultural tone. He had a different view regarding even religion; his stand was changed from 'No God, No Religion' of Periyar to 'One God and One Community'. Periyar's excessive celebration of rationality and atheism totally rejected any kind of sympathetic view towards "sacred". Every society in the world considers certain creeds or objects as sacred. Periyar's stand erased, to a great extent the concept of sacred from personal as well as public domain. Therefore, the stand adopted by Annadurai sounds very acceptable to for many laymen who constituted sizeable amount of DMK's support base.

At his time, many Congress leaders -- most of them were Brahmins, spoke in Public meetings and in Assembly debates in highly Sanskritized Tamil, which implicitly meant that Tamil was not adequately developed. This consistent and persistent effort of Congress leaders was challenged by Annadurai and his close associates. His prolific Tamil attracted massive gathering; it resurrected the hidden glory of Tamil's wonderful literary works. Annadurai came to be associated with Tamil pride and supremacy. In the mid-sixties (in 1965), when the Congress led state government decided to impose Hindi as compulsory language, Annadurai's oratorical talent alone ensured massive support in defence of Tamil's supremacy. Annadurai became an unchallengeable leader of Anti-Hindi agitation, which was seen as a quasi-war against Hindi's hegemony. Annadurai and his party's victory was, at that time itself, ensured. Annadurai,

actually, occupied the post of Chief Minister for around 18 months. Before he could implement much of his programmes/policies, he died in 1969. He died when he was considered as one of the tallest leaders of Tamil nationalist movement, which became quite obvious as his funeral procession is considered still as world's largest having few million people coming to the state capital from various parts of the state to attend it. However, there was no guarantee that he would have kept his charisma intact all the time, as there were very severe intra-party rivalry when he was the Chief Minister.

The leadership of DMK was appropriated by one of Annadurai's close associate M.Karunanidhi after the former's death. Born in a backward caste, Karunanidhi's succession to the top leadership was not very smooth after his political mentor's death. He was in fourth rank in Annadurai's cabinet. Obviously, the minister occupied the second rank was tipped for Chief Minister post. But M. Karunanidhi managed to get the support of many legislative members. It was the beginning of a tough fight for him<sup>46</sup>. But, he managed to come back to power in 1971 General Elections with thumping majority. However, inefficient administration, and growing explicit association with non-brahmin forward castes made people of lower echelon felt very much disillusioned. The erosion of his charismatic appeal gradually began. Of course, he has little amount of charisma as compared to that of Annadurai or Periyar. But still as the leader/President of the Tamil nationalist party, he did possess some amount of charisma, which also began to erode.

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<sup>46</sup> Barnett S.M. : Op. cit., pp. 282-311. See also Duncan Forrester : 1976, Factions and Film stars : Tamilnadu Politics since 1971, *Asian Survey* 16 : 283-96 and Rudolph, Lloyd I : 1961 Urban Life and Populist Radicalism, *Journal of Asian Studies*, pp. 283-97.

The erosion got aggravated further with the rise of M.G. Ramachandram (MGR) in the party hierarchy. The already disillusioned people of the lower and most backward caste groups were looking for an appropriate leader within the Tamil nationalist stream. Thus, MGR's new party Anna Dravidia Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK), rose to power in the state. Since 1977, till his death in 1987, MGR remained an unchallengeable leader of the party. Despite the allegations against him as non-Tamil (he was a Malayali) and leading one of the corrupt administrations MGR managed to keep his charismatic appeal intact. A very important reason for this was, the support base of MGR whose interests and demands, were always articulated through him. Therefore, calling him a non-Tamil did not make much impact. This aptly manifested in the response of people in whole of Tamilnadu, when he was undergoing treatment in the USA. People began to offer special rituals/pujas at temples for the good health of their Chief Minister. All the cinema halls had shown the popular MGR songs before the movie begins which were in appreciation of him<sup>47</sup>.

However, when we compare the erosion of charisma in MGR's case to that of his predecessor M. Karunanidhi, we could arrive at a conclusion, that MGR experienced very little amount of erosion in his charismatic appeal; one may even assume that the little erosion experienced resulted from general antipathy towards the 'establishment'.

Having analysed the charismatic attributes of various charismatic leaders in Tamil nationalism, we are, now, in a position to explore in which context,

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<sup>47</sup> Pandian, M.S.S. : 1992, op. Cit., pp. 3-35.

these attributes become functional and dominant. The forthcoming chapters would deal with this theme.

## *Chapter Three*

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## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF TAMIL NATIONALISM

It is exactly five centuries ago, the Portuguese traveller Vasco de Gama triumphed in landing on the West coast of India through sea route, when a new era began. This is not just an arrival of a European traveller to India; it is an opening up of a closed continent to the European colonisers; it laid the foundation for the genesis for world trade. The arrival of Vasco de Gama as the logical corollary of European enlightenment strongly constructed the basis for colonial expansion. However, it is also necessary to remember that it is the arrival of modernity as well. The enlightenment ethos with its initial hopes, promises and euphoria opened up new vistas to the people of this subcontinent.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the constant entry of Christian missionaries, traders from various parts of Europe, to a great extent, altered the very basis of the social system in India. The European particularly the British traders, later became the rulers, presented themselves as the real inheritors of enlightenment ethos and brought liberal political ideas to India. The active presence of Christian missionaries from various parts of Europe, with the patronage from the traders turned rulers, facilitated this process. Thus, with all such forces, having modernity as the core, Indian society began to respond to them.

The highly complex, heterogeneous nature of Indian social system with amalgam of customs and rituals and indispensable omnipresent role of caste this

had appeared heavily unfamiliar to the Europeans. Therefore, the compelling defining feature of Indian society made the colonisers to categorise the society through numbers; because numbers are believed to be the core for practising bureaucratic or instrumental rationality. The numbering process eventually was ending up in the categorisation of caste and religion and mother tongue. Having understood the essential/fundamental premise of Tamil nationalism in the beginning as anti-caste or anti-Brahmin; anti-Hinduism, Tamil linguistic identity became the rallying point around which new system of discourse had begun.

This is basically the trajectory of modernity itself. Modernity has generally been opposed to tradition in contemporary analyses of social and political change. The assumption that modernity and tradition are radically contradictory rests on a misdiagnosis of tradition as it is found in traditional societies, a misunderstanding of modernity as it is found in modern societies, and a misapprehension of the relationship between them<sup>1</sup> says Rudolph and Rudolph in their analysis.

The main tenets of traditional explanations of caste, raised to the status of official definitions, paved the way for decoding India; this is not only for the colonising West but for the colonised Indians too. The researches and survey undertaken could be grouped under two broad categories. The empirical realists, consisting of the Christian missionaries and administrators and the Romantic idealists of the Orientalists and philosophers of religion and comparative religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolph & Rudolph : 1967. The Modernity of Tradition : Political Development in India, Orient Longman, See p. 3-14.

For both of them, caste was the defining institution of a "Hindu India"<sup>2</sup> and both linked it with the racial theory of Aryan conquest. The corpus of knowledge thus generated to facilitate, while identifying the other, had far-reaching consequences.

In these circumstances, the role of Christian missionaries should be referred to. They were the first westerners to show an interest in Tamil culture and to study Tamil language. The European missionaries like Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656); Constantius Beschi (1680-1743), Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819-1891) and G.U. Pope (1820-1907) were also outstanding Tamil scholars<sup>3</sup>.

The works of these scholars had opened up a new age in the colonial Tamil society. Particularly, Rev. Caldwell's A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages" and Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's Malabarisches Heidenthum (Malabarian or Tamil Paganism) provided the Tamils new insights into their past and present. Caldwell's socio-linguistic work and Ziegenbalg's quasi-ethnographic survey offered adequate avenue for westerners as well to probe further into the complexities of Tamil society during colonial period<sup>4</sup>. Caldwell developed the theory that Sanskrit had been brought to south India originally by Aryan/Brahmin colonialists and with them a peculiar type of Hinduism, which embodied the worship of idols. This view had full political

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<sup>2</sup> Cohn, Bernard S. : 1987. An Anthropologist among Historians and other essays, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.136-171.

<sup>3</sup> Irschick, Eugene F. : 1994. Dialogue and History : Constructing south India 1795-1895, University of California Press, Berkeley, see also K. Meenakshi Sundaram 1974 : The Contribution of European scholars to Tamil, University of Madras, Madras.

<sup>4</sup> For literature on Ziegenbalg, see Arno-Lehmann, It began at Tranquebar : A history of the first christian mission in India ; CLS Madras, 1956.

patronage given by the colonial masters; British officials like J.H. Nelson and M.E. Grant-Duff of Madras Presidency echoed the sentiment of these missionaries<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, their effort to introduce printing technology revolutionised the era. In fact their interest in exploring and finding out new insights from Tamil literature and culture is considered to be the incipient stage of Tamil renaissance; it remains the core/essence of subsequent Tamil nationalism.

Before the advent of European scholars into the domain of Tamil literature, prose in the language had been a mere rivulet, compared to the vast ocean of Tamil poetry. "With European interest exerting itself the small rivulet filled its banks, breaking its shores to form a recognisable river, overflowing with torrential literary works and threatening occasionally to overshadow poetry" hails Meenakshi Sundaram<sup>6</sup> with much admiration for missionary's work.

Before the arrival of European scholars and printing press to India, all writing was done chiefly on the leaves of the palm tree with the aid of a sharp, pointed iron stylus. At a time, only one copy could be produced. The Europeans brought the printing press to India, thus revolutionising the literary scene. The first Tamil book ever printed in Europe (at Halle) was 'Grammatica Damulica' by Ziegenbalg<sup>7</sup>. Thus, books were made available at acceptable prices and no longer were they the monopoly of the rich. At the dawn of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of missionaries increased. It was reported that around 132 European missionaries

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<sup>5</sup> Irschick : op. Cit., pp. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Meenakshi Sundaram op. cit., p.1.

<sup>7</sup> ibid, pp.9.

were functioning in Tamil society<sup>8</sup>. To propagate the ideas and beliefs and to spread gospel - which had been the primary concern of missionaries throughout their stay during colonial period - they started a large number of schools. For the use of these schools they collaborated with native writers and wrote books in Tamil, set their standards and syllabus (missionary). However, disappointed, disturbed by the highly hierarchized and unequal caste system their concern for equality among the people increased. Apparently, the conversions were aiming at giving protection to people from lower echelon. For example, at the tip of southern peninsula, the fishermen caste, the Paravas were exploited and suppressed by both Hindus and Muslims and finally they sought (Portuguese) missionary protection and in return formally embraced Christianity. Between 1535 to 1537, about 20,000 people, practically the whole caste, were baptised<sup>9</sup>.

Along with the introduction of liberal, modern and radical ideas, they helped the native Tamils to identify their own heritage and antiquity. During this period, the introduction of modern education played crucial role among the natives.

### **Modern Education and Its Liberal Ethos**

The advent of modern education brought in by the colonial masters caused great amount of unrest in the highly stratified society on caste lines. In

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>9</sup> Firth, F.B. : 1961 : An Introduction to Indian Church History, CLS, Madras, p. 58. Here certain references have to be made. In the beginning of missionary activities, individual conversion was advocated, later periods, mass, community based conversion began to take place. Thus, the bonds of caste system remained as normal as its used to be. See for details F.B. Forrester : 1980 Caste and Christianity, Curzon Press, London.

such a stratified system, obviously, those at the upper echelon, by virtue of their birth, enjoyed all social privileges in the process of imparting knowledge as well. It was the Brahmin caste that had the exclusive right to preach religious doctrines, to officiate as priests and to function as teachers. This exclusivism in the domain of knowledge system was challenged with the arrival of modern education. This education system introduced by the British was basically contradictory to the hitherto prevailing education system, as it was secular in character and liberal in essence. It was the key, which opened the great treasures of rationalist and democratic thought of the modern west to India. It is, however, necessary to remember that the modern education system was introduced by the British to meet the political and administrative needs of the colonial raj. The unexpected consequences of this system strengthened, in the final analysis, radical as well as progressive elements in the subcontinent. One such element was the social mobility of native people of lower echelon.

The western system of education, with its inherent liberal ethos made the native people's education system less religious, and opened up many branches of learning. The printing press revolutionised the educational system in that the emphasis shifted from personal oral communication to impersonal communication of ideas through books, journals and other media. It brought the sacred scriptures within the reach of many castes who were not allowed by custom to read them. English education was also the medium for the spread of modern science and ideas of equality and liberty<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the western education

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<sup>10</sup> M.S.A. Rao : 1967 : Education, social stratification and mobility in Papers in The sociology of Education in India, Ed. In M.S. Gore, I.P. Desai and S. Chitnis, NCERT, New Delhi, p. 127-146.

system was gradually thrown open to all the castes, religious groups and to women. Western education rendered occupation a relatively independent element of social status. And the occupational advantages gave the people a new life style. The emergence of middle-class is basically an offshoot of western education in general and professional degree education, in particular. The newly educated middle class in India could cut across different castes. The educational development, in some parts of India, such as, Tamil nadu, Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra was closely associated with non-Brahmin movement, and the counteracting efforts of the Brahmins. This system had offered avenue for upward social mobility for many depressed communities<sup>11</sup>. However, more often than not positive value is associated with learning of physical and biological sciences, medicine and engineering rather than the humanities and social sciences.

This is due to two reasons. It is quite clear that science education had more modernising effects and it alone could create manpower, which is indispensable for economic and industrial growth<sup>12</sup>. Obviously, pure science education and its immediate economic dividends have another positive aspect in them. The labour force/manpower it creates at the core remains highly neutral and free from caste or religious affinities.

Therefore, the rise of modern education did really alter the social structure. The establishment of Madras University in late 19<sup>th</sup> century (1861) and

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see K.M. Kapadia 1959 : 'Progress of Education in Navsari Taluka, Sociological Bulletin, vol. VIII, No. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Singh, Yogendra : 1972. Modernization of Indian Tradition, Rawat, Jaipur, pp. 101-107.

the Guindy Engineering college in Madras as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (1793) had provided adequate avenue for the native people to mobilise themselves for higher social status and realise the exploitation unleashed by the colonisers and the local elites namely the Brahmins.

With the help of modern education and Christian missionaries, the native Tamils had realised their glorious past. During this period many Tamil classical works of literature have been published in a book form, such as *Civakacintamani* (1887), *Pattupattu* (1889), *Cilappathikaram* (1892), *Purananuru* (1894), *Purapporul Venpa-malai* (1895), *Manimekalai* (1898), *Ainkurunuru* (1903) and *Patitrupattu* (1904)<sup>13</sup>. Having had access to such classical texts, the native Tamils began to understand the anti-caste or caste free social system in classical period and its manifestation in Tamil Nationalism.

Elaborate research works undertaken by scholars reached the conclusion that the *sangam* period of the native Tamils had been undoubtedly glorious. Robert Caldwell observed in 1856 that, 'for the last two hundred years Dravidian literature appears to have made but little real progress'. Nevertheless with the help of external and progressive elements, a leap as far as the literary works are concerned, was well anticipated by him: 'A virgin soil is no for the first time being ploughed, turned up to the air and light and sown with the seed of life; and in process of time we may reasonably expect to reap a rich crop of intellectual

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<sup>13</sup> Arooram, Nambi : 1980, Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, Koodal Publication, Madurai, p. 19.



and moral results<sup>14</sup>. The rediscovery of old Tamil classics began during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this can be considered as the beginning of Tamil renaissance/nationalism. The two men most responsible for the rediscoveries were C.W. Tamotharam Pillai (1832-1901) and U.V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942).

Tamotharam Pillai, a Jaffna born Tamil scholar is remembered for his meticulous job in collecting various interpretations for *Tolkappiam*, which is one of the earliest works in Tamil grammar. All such interpretation compiled and compared were published by him. Subsequently, the old classics, which were in the form of palm-leaf, were published in book form. In similar vein, the incredible job by U.V. Swaminatha Iyer has to be referred to. He collected all poems and other related materials. Then he managed to get them published in a book form. By 1905 he had brought out the first printed editions of eight major works. His effort to publish many such works extended the horizon of Tamil literature<sup>15</sup>.

The publication of ancient Tamil classics stimulated the resurgence of interest in modern Tamil literature. Coincidental with this interest in Tamil literature and language was the beginning of an attempt to delve into the Tamil past to discover the origin, growth and decline of Tamil civilisation. The theory first outlined by Caldwell that Tamil culture had a separate and independent

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<sup>14</sup> R. Caldwell : 1875 : A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages, London, p. 153, Trubner.

<sup>15</sup> See, for details K. Sundaragavan, 1942, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyer ,Biography in Tamil, pp. 1-22.

existence before the coming of Aryans/Brahmins into south India came to be widely accepted more enthusiastically in the light of the rediscovered ancient Tamil literature.

On the same line, P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897) was perhaps one of the pioneers to propagate the ideas concerning the antiquity and cultural self-sufficiency of the Dravidians. In his book '*Some milestones in the history of Tamil literature*' he pointed out that 'there was a period lost altogether in hoary antiquity, when the native Dravidian religion was alone in vogue. The first influence brought to bear upon the primitive form of worship was that of the vedic religion'<sup>16</sup>. From 1880s onwards non-Brahmin Tamil scholars attempted to show that the Dravidian religious system was distinctive and also superior to the teachings of veda by propounding the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. This saiva siddhanta philosophy has its roots in the tradition of '*chitars*' who propagated highly contradictory philosophy, worldview and even medicine system in 7<sup>th</sup> century Tamil society. Their anti-caste and anti-Brahmin perception was deeply incorporated into Saiva Siddhanta philosophy<sup>17</sup>. G.U. Pope (1820-1908), who had spent almost six decades of his life in studying Tamil literature and its critical examination, was the first European scholar of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. In the introduction to the '*Tiruvacagam*', he observed that the Saiva Siddhanta system was the 'most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all religions in India'<sup>18</sup>. He also observed that Saivism was the old

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<sup>16</sup> P. Sundaram Pillai quoted in Nambi Arooran, op. Cit., p.20.

<sup>17</sup> See for details, K. Meenakshi in Chempaklakshmi, and S. Gopal (ed.).

<sup>18</sup> G.U. Pope (tr) *Tiruvacagam*, (Oxford 1900), p. IXXIV.

pre-historic religion of south India and that it was in existence from pre-Aryan times. He adds further that 'in course of time, northern-Aryan, Vedic, Brahminical influences' were introduced over the native Dravidian religion of Saivism and eventually the Tamils adopted to a great extent the vedic forms of worship<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, the re-discovery of Tamil antiquity and the glorious Tamil civilisation was a major breakthrough as far as the construction of Tamil nationalism is concerned. There is, similarly, another side of this nationalism too. This side is also said to be the consequence of modernity; the re-discovery of non-Brahmin identity, which was being subjugated by, alien Brahmins.

## **II) Cast Confrontation**

Indian society is known for the unique stratification system namely the caste system. Keeping its foundation on the notion of purity and pollution, this specific form of ascriptive hierarchy and unequal distribution of power in India, crystallised. This highly hierarchical structure based on ascriptive status, functions with segmented occupational and endogamous castes; it is endowed with differential distribution of privileges and legitimised by the religious sanctions on the basis of karma and dharma. It is certainly a pan-Indian phenomenon, though spread unevenly. This structure, ever since it got clearly crystallised, keeps the Brahmin atop and propertied and clean castes following and Shudra, ati-Shudra, labouring and polluted castes at the bottom. The foundation of the entire system was status determined by birth, legitimised and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. IXXV.

sanctified by the dominant Brahminic religio-cultural symbol and belief traditions. M.N. Srinivas observes of the caste system:

'caste is undoubtedly an all-hereditary, endogamous groups which form a hierarchy. Everywhere there are Brahmins, untouchables and peasants, artisans, trading and service castes. Relations between castes are invariably expressed in terms of pollution and purity. Certain Hindu theological ideas such as Samskara, karma and dharma are woven into the caste system... the ordering of different varnas is clearly intended to support the theory of Brahminical supremacy'<sup>20</sup>.

This institutionalised inequality of the caste system was very much antithetical to the principles of modernity. Thus, with the overwhelming presence of modernity, this unequal system began to receive severe criticism and the sudras and ati-sudras began to register their protest. The genesis of such anti-caste and anti-Brahmin sentiment can be traced back as early as the era of Buddha. During the period of modern era or colonial regime one of the very important outcomes was the peasantization of economy and Brahmanization of society. Colonialism to a great extent empowered the Brahmins. Swami Dharma Theertha, as early as 1944 summarised the aspects of Brahminic empowerment during the British era. To quote him:

'First they raised the Brahmins to the highest post of power, profit and confidence. Secondly, they chivalrously championed the cause of the decaying temples: idolatrous festivals and charming dancing girls with the hearty patronage and protection of the company's government, to the mutual advantage and recreation of the company and the priests. Thirdly, they established caste cutcherries, the most dreaded tribunals of Hindus. Fourthly, they unearthed from their oblivion Manushastra and other spurious texts which the vast majority of the Hindus had never heard of and elevated them to the status of authoritative works of Hindu law. Fifthly, they handed over the temples to the control of trustees and this facilitated the aggrandisement of Brahminism and deprivation of the rights of the lower orders. Sixthly, through judicial decisions and

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<sup>20</sup> Srinivas M.N. : 1966, Social Change in Modern India, Orient Longman Ltd., Hyderabad, pp. 3.

administrative classification and even by legal enactments, the so-called Hindu law has been applied to all Indians who are not Christians or Muslims. Seventhly, they gave caste distinctions royal recognition, state protection, enhanced dignity, positive value and significance and even political importance. Eighthly, they blasted the hopes of reformers and teachers by making it impossible for them to alter the status quo by any practicable means. Ninthly, in the name of non-interference they have actively strengthened and perpetuated the evils of society which it was their duty to fight<sup>21</sup>.

On the contrary, the colonial modernity did provide space for the non-Brahmin Sudra and ati-Sudra castes to mobilise themselves. Perhaps, this era was very much instrumental in posing the dichotomy between the Brahmins versus the non-Brahmin Sudras and ati-Sudras. By virtue of their being very well off in all respects, Brahmins managed to elevate themselves, with the help of Britishers to a great extent. As M.N. Srinivas opined 'it is my hunch that the varna model became more popular during the British period as a result of variety of forces'<sup>22</sup>

This situation resulted in the overwhelming monopoly of Brahmin supremacy in all colonial structures. In the case of Madras Presidency too, the situation was the same and gives us unbreakable Brahmin hegemony. Some of the top government posts held by Brahmins were as follows. In 1912, with just 3.2 % of the total population in the Presidency, Brahmins managed to occupy 77 posts of Deputy Collectors against the non-Brahmin Hindus who were in 30 posts with 85.6 % population. For the post of sub-judges they held 15 out of 18 posts.

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<sup>21</sup> Swami Dhrama Theertha quoted in Aloysius (1997 b), pp. 40-41.

<sup>22</sup> Srinivas M.N. : 1962, Caste in Modern India and other essays, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, p. 16.

The majority non-Brahmins had only 3 posts<sup>23</sup>. It was similar in educational sector as well.

The literacy level among various caste groups would tell us unambiguously the discrimination, from 1901-1921<sup>24</sup>. This is presented in the following table:

**TABLE: 1. The General Literacy Level Among Various Caste Groups In First Three Decades Of This Century.**

CASTES/YEAR	1901	1911	1921
Brahmin	73.6	71.9	71.5
Chetti	32.0	39.1	39.5
Nadar	15.4	18.1	20.0
Vellala	6.9	24.6	24.2
Agamudayar	14.9	20.8	20.8
Kallar	10.9	15.7	16.3
Maravar	10.6	13.8	13.7
Vanniyar	14.8	31.7	29.8

<sup>23</sup> Arooran, op. cit. P.37.

<sup>24</sup> Census of India, Madras 1921, XIII pp.,128-129.

As far as literacy level in English is concerned, the picture we get would be more shocking, as illustrated in the following table:

**TABLE: 2 Literacy Level In English Among Various Caste Groups In First Three Decades Of This Century**

CASTES/YEAR	1901	1911	1921
Brahmin	17.88	22.27	28.21
Chettiyar	0.15	0.98	2.34
Nadar	0.05	0.30	0.75
Vellalar	0.19	2.12	2.37
Agamudayar	0.15	0.33	0.72
Kallar	0.13	0.27	0.38
Maravar	0.04	0.13	0.23
Vanniyar	0.04	1.12	1.12

This blatant and obvious hierarchy and discrimination caused great amount of frustration and bitterness among the non-Brahmin native Tamils. With the social and educational status been elevated to the highest level in the social milieu, the Brahminism reached a sense of universalism, it manifested everywhere in attempts to exclude the Sudras and ati-Sudras from the sphere of education, jobs and political representation. The notion of purity-pollution

acquired new vigour and several tracts were published in Tamil glorifying 'varnashrama dharma' and the caste system as the great national legacy<sup>25</sup>.

The caste-wise distribution of educated people from Madras University in the beginning of this century would tell us, as to how the strict hierarchy manifested in modern apparatus<sup>26</sup>.

**TABLE: 3 Bachelors of Arts from Madras University**

YEAR/ COMMUNITY	Brahmins	Non-Brahmins	Indian- Christians	Europeans
1901-11	73.1 %	18.0 %	5.3 %	4 %
1918	67.5 %	21.1 %	8.8 %	3 %

It was not just relative deprivation of non-Brahmin native Tamils that kept the Brahmins as everlasting reference groups for their social progress; what has become a predominant perception in the academic circle at one point in time<sup>27</sup>. Though, apparently, it could be cited as a vital reason for the emergence of backward class movement in Tamil society, this movement did not cease to exist within the boundary of just backward class movement. Its manifestations and reflections were the core and essence of Tamil nationalism itself. As is noted already the existence of particular core and essence could be traced to era of 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. itself in Tamil society.

<sup>25</sup> Aloysius, 1997 (b), pp. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Barnett, M.R. : 1976, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in south India, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

<sup>27</sup> See particularly M.S.A. Rao in Social Movements in India, pp. 171.



However, certain facts are to be admitted which are certainly the other side of the same coin. The emergence of Tamil nationalism at the turn of this century in the name of either Justice Party or Dravidar Kazhagam is not at all the true representation of Tamil Nationalism. What we could say is that these organisations explicitly followed the politics closer to the essence of Tamil nationalism - that is breaking the hegemony of Brahminical supremacy. This understanding would certainly enhance our clarity in this particular matter as the various phases and forms of Dravidian parties are to be analysed subsequently. Lacking this understanding has caused great deal of damage to, particularly, the nationalist's view of explaining Tamil nationalism.

Under such circumstances, the need for having an organised structure to collectively register the protest of non-Brahmins was deeply felt. It led to various formations, from South Indian Liberal Association to a variety of Dravidian Parties<sup>28</sup>. However, one particular incident has to be referred to, as it triggered off the movement into more and more organised way. That was the release of non-Brahmin Manifesto. On behalf of the south Indian People's Association, P. Thiagaroya Chetti and Dr. T.M. Nair, released the manifesto, documenting at the pre-eminent position of the Brahmins in various fields and pointing out the directions for progress, of the non-Brahmins in future. It declared that the Indian Constitution should be revised after war and there should be progressive political development towards self-government and in the meanwhile the British authority

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<sup>28</sup> See for details, Hardgrave : 1967, Dravidian movement, M.R. Barnett (1976).

which alone could hold the scales even between various castes and creeds should continue<sup>29</sup>.

This manifesto remains one of the prime guiding principles, in the early days, for the movement leaders. The later formations of Justice Party, Self-Respect movement and Dravidar Kazhagam, to a great extent, drew their inspiration from the essence of this manifesto only.

### **A Brief Note on Other Southern States During Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.**

In our endeavour to contextualize a unique type of leadership--charismatic--in modern Tamil society, it is necessary to ask ourselves, simultaneously, why is that other southern states, supposedly sharing the Dravidian legacy, did not produce similar type of leadership. Though Andhra Pradesh witnessed such type of leadership through N.T. Rama Rao, it did not persist and the erosion of the leader occurred very soon. Therefore, the need to analyse the social context of other three southern states vis-à-vis Tamil society has become very important.

Before embarking upon the analysis of these three linguistic societies--Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh--certain basic features found common among all these states are to be listed. As in Tamil society, these societies also had very strong anti-Brahmin movements. This movement has been generally categorised as backward class movements. But there are variations in their

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Arooran, 1980, op. Cit., pp. 48.

approach and goals. However, the overwhelming influence of modernity, particularly in the three presidencies of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras during colonial period, resulted in renaissance and reform. The militant emergence of Dalit movement in Bombay Presidency (Maharashtra) the strong non-Brahmin movement in Madras Presidency and various types of reform movement within the Hindu fold in Calcutta Presidency have clearly shown us the liberating thrust of modernity. As it is said already the variations in the *modus operandi* became the yardstick to characterise these movements. Various parts of Madras Presidency witnessed the emergence of non-Brahmin movement.

First of all, in the case of Kerala, the emergence of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P. Yogam) was a clear example. A movement founded by Sree Narayana Guru in 1903 attempted to dismantle the inequalities and annihilate caste system. Along with Naryana Guru, a few other rebels had joined him in their revolt against the minority Brahmin monopoly. Chattambi Swamikal, the great Nair reformist; the Sadhu Jana Paripalana yogam founded by Ayyankali, a leading Dalit revolutionary; the Nair Service Society founded by Mannath Padbhanabhan had actually aimed at breaking the tentacles of casteism. The S.N.D.P. movement, among all such similar attempts, succeeded to a great extent, particularly, in enhancing the status of Ezhava community--the largest and highest community among the ex-untouchables. However, the fundamental premise of S.N.D.P. over which the whole movement was built, leave us with much ambiguity.

The S.N.D.P. Movement is undoubtedly both a religious and a social reform movement. The reason being is that Narayana Guru attempted to do all his reformative exercises within the Hindu fold; by consecration of temples for Ezhavas and other ex-untouchables on the model of caste Hindu temples and installation of caste Hindu deities in these temples. Narayana Guru himself was a strong believer in 'advaita' philosophy of Sankara and he aimed at bringing equality and fraternity on the basis of this philosophy. Therefore, it was more of a Hindu religious reform movement as it lacked significantly radical content in it. This approach was never a challenge in true sense, to the ruling class-minority of Brahmins. Perhaps, the co-option technique was found more convenient to sustain their monopoly even at a time, when they appear to have lost control over the society. It gets reflected in the failure of the radical atheist movement in Kerala. The Rationalist association founded by K. Ayyappan, M.C. Joseph and Rama Varma Thampan did not succeed substantially. Thus, on the caste question, the popular reform movement in Kerala adopted acceptable a compromising stand<sup>30</sup>.

We get a parallel picture in the case of Karnataka as well. Surprisingly, there was no modern reform movements originated from the soil of Karnataka. The Brahma Samaj, the Arja Samaj and the theosophical society were the popular reform movements in modern period along with Ramakrishna Mission; yet none grew out of Karnataka itself. A stark, blatant hierarchy on the basis of ascriptive status was found in Karnataka during the colonial period.

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<sup>30</sup> See for details, S.P. Sen (Ed.) : Social and Religion Reform Movements in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, pp. 386-390, 1979.

'As higher learning was limited mostly to Brahmins, they were largely represented in the services of the state. They were also landlords. In the early part of the nineteenth century about 1/50 of the population owned property worth from Rs.2,000/- to Rs.5,000/- and Brahmins formed quite half of this class and the remainder generally was made up of the best men of other classes'<sup>31</sup>.

However, this excessive degree of disparity sparked off the assertion by the backward communities of non-Brahmins. This movement was spearheaded by the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, the two dominant castes of this region; by establishing caste associations for effective mobilisation. Thus, the Lingayats established the 'Mysore Lingayat Education Fund Association' in 1905 and in 1906 the Vokkaligas formed the 'Vokkaliga Sangha'. The non-Brahmin connection provided them with a common platform and held these groups together as long as there was Brahmin dominance<sup>32</sup>.

The massive mobilisation unleashed by these groups, resulted in many reforms in the society. Attempts were seriously made for abolishing child marriage, widow remarriage, etc. nevertheless, it did not evolve radical alternative to the dominant ideology based upon superstitions, caste hierarchy and religious sanctions-- Brahminism. Rather, the non-Brahmin movement finally merged with the Congress in the state in 1938. During this period, the non-Brahmin groups began to loose their cohesion, intended to demand for communal representation for respective caste groups. When this demand was given due

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, pp. 374.

<sup>32</sup> Chandra Sekhar Bhatt in M.S.A. Rao, op. cit., pp.171, 1978.

importance in the Constitution, the radical content of such a movement became a distant possibility.

As far as the situation in the present Andhra Pradesh is concerned, there are some qualitative differences found among the Telugu society during colonial period regarding the way the anti-caste movement had been constructed. Of course, there was a strong reform movement under the leadership of Kandukkuri Viresalingam Pantulu (1848-1919) who attempted to create modern Telugu prose for the propagation of social and religious reform. As a strong believer in astrology and puranas, he attacked all the social evils - child marriage, polygamy and sati. However, by virtue of his caste background he seemed to have taken a very soft stand towards caste system. Though his concern for women's education was undoubtedly a valuable contribution to Telugu society, it was not radical enough in its content.

At the same time, another strong radical movement was gaining popular support during colonial period. The militant peasant movement in Telungana region was certainly progressive in content. The beginning was of different kind; it was to maintain the self-respect of Telugu speaking people and work for the growth of cultural and linguistic tradition of their language as the influence of Urdu and Marathi were overwhelming<sup>33</sup>.

Thus emerged the Andhra Jana Sangham in 1923 with the objective of developing research in Telugu language and culture. It, latter began to take

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<sup>33</sup> Ranga Rao in M.S.A. Rao, 1978, op.cit., p.152.

interest in the abolition of social evils such as forced labour. Subsequently, the leaders of Telengana felt the need to advocate the message of social reform, which led to the genesis of Andhra Mahasabha in 1930. Sabha's successful campaign took a new turn with the rise of young leader Ravi Narayan Reddy. A radical and leftist, he, in the early 1940s took full control of the Sabha and marginalized the rightists. It later involved into armed struggle against the landlords backed by the Nizams.

When the movement began, it had so much of religious tone, lacking in radical content, but when it began to become radical it lost the traditional or cultural touch. Certainly, Telengana remains a great region of pride for the entire working class; however, the nationalist aspiration of Telugu people got totally marginalized. The Communist Party of India (CPI) totally opposed the armed struggle and declared it as 'undesirable'. After the split in 1964, the CPI (M), in their retrospective analysis, supported the continuation of the struggle but not as a liberation struggle against Indian Union<sup>34</sup>. After independence, the Union Government under Jawaharlal Nehru came down heavily on revolutionary movement's cadres. As time passed by, the movement lost many of its leaders. The co-option technique of Indian state successfully diluted the radical content of it. Thereby, a militant attempt to dismantle the core of caste system, that is, the feudal social order and retaining the cultural pride of Telugu people and on the basis of it's building up a national identity was crushed.

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<sup>34</sup> T.G.Jacob, (ed.) 1988, National Question in India: CPI Documents 1942-47. Odyssey Press, New Delhi.

Now, we are in a position to analyse and draw certain corollaries from the social context of the southern states. Though an anti-caste/anti-Brahmin movement was found gaining popular support during colonial period, lack of separate cultural identity was missing. That is to say, they did the reforms within the religious (Hindu) fold. Challenging the monopoly of minority Brahmins was never linked to the emancipatory content of their native tradition, culture and language. Reform movements confined themselves within an exclusive domain. The progressive, secular and radical content of the native culture was not properly understood. Eventually, all of them got successfully co-opted by highly hierarchized, religious and reactionary tradition of alien Brahminism and their religion, Hinduism.



*Chapter Four*

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## THE CONTEXT OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Having analysed the social context of Tamil nationalist movement during the period of colonial era, now we are in a position to analyse the post-independent scenario as some of the major developments had ironically accelerated the aspirations of Tamil nationalist forces. This would certainly provide us with another dimension for the understanding of charismatic leadership. As it is already pointed out, along with anti-Brahmin and anti-Hindu orientation, the anti-Hindi sentiment of the Tamil nationalist leaders, also constituted an aspect of ideology. In fact, the intrinsic relationship between caste, language and religion with its antagonistic tone to that of Brahminism became the foundation of Tamil nationalism.

The language became a centre of mobilisation during the colonial period itself. From 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards there were important changes in the regional societies resulting from the arrival of modernity. As the British consolidated their conquests, they relied on the upper castes who were by virtue of their birth had literacy in their vernacular language, like the Chitpavan Brahmins in Bombay Presidency, the Tamil Brahmins in Madras Presidency and the Badraloks and Kayasthas of Calcutta Presidency and Bihar, etc., for carrying out their routine administration<sup>1</sup>. They were the people who performed all scholarly and administrative function in the pre-colonial period.

In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century itself, there were discussions about the national

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<sup>1</sup> Seal, A. : 1968 The Emergence of Nationalism in India, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

language of independent India. As early as 1906, there were occasional references to the need for developing a lingua franca for the whole of India. At a public meeting in Madras in the same year, resolution was passed to implement either Hindi or Hindustani as the lingua franca for the entire India<sup>2</sup>. Many Congress leaders endorsed this idea, as they strongly believed that they were the genuine representatives of the nationalist aspirations of people from the entire subcontinent.

Leaders of Congress party had felt that the problems of linguistic identity, particularly in the immediate two decades before and after independence really confronted them so heavily; that they feared possible 'balkanisation' of India. The fear became very valid as there were mounting pressure from various linguistic groups in the subcontinent claiming their rights in the multi-linguistic geographic territory, called India. Most of the language conflicts in the period of Jawaharlal Nehru, some of them became at times bitter and violent, were ultimately resolved through accommodative solutions. In fact, the central Government had to go for it, as any attempt for creating homogeneity would result in devastating consequences.

In spite of growing linguistic consciousness among various ethnic nationalities in the subcontinent during colonial period, both the British government and the Congress government had made elaborate arrangements through constitutional measures to implement Hindi as the 'national' language for whole of India. It manifested in the speeches and writings of all Congress leaders who all had presumed that they were the true representatives of anti-imperialist/national aspirations of the entire masses in this subcontinent. It was at the 8<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Hindi Sahitya

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<sup>2</sup> Arooran, N. : 1980, op. Cit., pp. 186 and S.V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha, 1996, op. cit., pp. 608-609.

Sammelan at Indore in 1918 that M.K. Gandhi mooted the idea of making systematic efforts to popularise Hindi in south India. The propagation of Hindi in south was considered to be one of the chief items in the national constructive programme as conceived by Gandhi towards the realisation of 'national' self-respect and freedom through truth and non-violence<sup>3</sup>. Gandhi discussed in detail for the immediate need to have a national language of India and categorically rejected that English be considered for it. It goes without saying he emphasised again and again that Hindi was best suited for this purpose<sup>4</sup>.

It was again Gandhi who founded the 'Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha' (Institute for the Propagation of Hindi in south India) in Madras in 1918, 'with the bold and very ambitious aim of spreading the knowledge of Hindi in south'<sup>5</sup>. The provincial Congress conference held at Tinnevely in June 1920 accepted a donation of Rs. 50,000 from a Marwari for the propagation of Hindi in the Madras Presidency<sup>6</sup>. Alarmed by the growing popularity for Tamil nationalist movement for its anti-Hindi feeling, Gandhi wrote in 1920, 'The Dravidian being in a minority, national economy suggests that they should learn the common language of the rest of India, that the rest should learn Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in order to be able to converse with Dravidian India'<sup>7</sup>. The provincial congress party leaders began to endorse this logic of Gandhi and other congress central leadership S. Sathyamurthy Iyer, one of the chief lieutenants of Gandhi in Madras Presidency echoed as early as in 1924, 'I am one of those who are passionately attached to the idea of a common language for India. I

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<sup>3</sup> Gandhi, M.K. : 1956 Hindi and English in the South, Navjeevan, Ahmedabad, p. iii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp.5-9.

<sup>6</sup> Aroonan, N. : 1980, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Gandhi. M.K. op. cit., p.9.

do not believe that adults can easily learn Hindi, but if in all elementary schools Hindi is taught as a compulsory language, I've no doubt that in another ten years throughout India, Hindi will be understood as a common language<sup>8</sup>.

After a point of time, along with the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress, All-India Hindi conferences came to be held from 1924 onwards. In 1927, Sarojini Naidu who presided over the function, claimed that the Hindi Prachar Movement was not the work of any party or community and that it stood for the unification of all the peoples, all the communities and all the parties of the country<sup>9</sup>. In Madras Presidency, it became so important for the Congress party as there was severe protest against the hegemonizing policies and politics of Congress. Implementation of Hindi became a primary task during the tenure of Rajaji. When he spoke in Loyola College function in July 27, 1937: 'when a person learns how to read and write Hindi, he automatically acquires the capability to learn Sanskrit as well. By its very nature, Hindi has already become a common language of India. If my governments' policy to go for compulsory Hindi in school level, it would be a great moment of pride and proud for us'. It was exactly in August first week of 1937 as the Premier of Madras Presidency, Rajaji has announced the compulsory implementation of Hindi in first three forms (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> standards)<sup>10</sup>. In fact, implementing Hindi as compulsory subject as the second language was taken in 1936 itself; but this decision was meant for only the final year students<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Sathyamurti quoted from Hindu, 12 June 1924, in Aroonam, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> Aroonam, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Copley, A.R.H. : The Political Career of Rajagopalachari, 1937-54.

<sup>11</sup> Irschick, E.F. : op. cit., pp. 212-213.

The spread of Hindi was not uniform in other Dravidian linguistic regions of south India. In Tamil society Hindi was restricted to a significant level as that of other parts of south India. The following table exemplifies this fact:

**TABLE: 4 The Region-wise Statistics Available for 1929-30<sup>12</sup>**

STATES	No. of Those Passed in April Exam		No. of Those Passed in November Exam	
	No.	%	No.	%
Tamilnadu	93	12 %	66	7 %
Andhra	166	22 %	390	43 %
Karnataka	384	52 %	148	16 %
Kerala	101	14 %	312	34 %

It was however quite clear from the language of Congress leaders that they were quite desperate to implement Hindi as a compulsory subject:

any amount of preaching would not be enough for India; they should be compelled by some means to learn Hindi. The best way of doing it was by introducing it in schools. Hindi should be a compulsory language from the first form to fourth form. In that case India would become a Hindi country in fifteen years' says Sathyamurthy Iyer, Madras Presidency Congress chief while addressing a gathering<sup>13</sup>.

In fact, the self-styled socialist and architect of modern India, Nehru, again and again conformed his commitment to go for homogeneity through enforcing Hindi by

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from The Hindu 15<sup>th</sup> April 1929 in Arooran, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> S. V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha : 1996, op. cit., 612.

sending campaign committee to South India and by establishing a massive, separate building for 'Institute for the propagation of Hindi' in Madras in 1937<sup>14</sup>. When C.Rajagopalachariar (Rajaji) announced his decision to go for the implementation of Hindi as compulsory language/subject, in the legislative assembly, the opposition party--Justice party and its leader M.A. Muthiah Chettiar objected to it and suggested it could be offered as an optional course. To this, Rajaji replied that he would attribute the objection to two sets of people, 'one cursed with prejudices of anti-Aryanism and the other cursed with hatred of the Congress'<sup>15</sup>. It was very clear from his statement that Congress was very keen and strong in its policies of implementing Hindi. The All India Hindi Prachar Samithi, Wardha, sent a Hindi delegation to tour South India in March 1937 to impress upon the south Indian public the necessity for cultural and national unity in India by the spread of a common language namely Hindi. At its conference in Madras in March 1937, Hindi was described as 'a symbol of nationalism'. Thus, Hindi came to be associated with 'nationalism'<sup>16</sup>. Excessive celebration by Brahmin Congress leaders for Hindi and Sanskritic tradition once again resurrected the nationalist feeling among the native Tamils. The blatant and sarcastic remarks regarding Tamils by the Brahmin congress leaders went on to the extent of saying 'in traditional India, only Sanskrit was the great tradition and its manifestation, in today's context is Hindi; therefore only Hindi alone can enjoy the privilege of having come from the ancient tradition' and Sathyamurthy Iyer said, 'only Sanskrit has an

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<sup>14</sup> To explain further on the Brahminic hegemony in the nation building process and how the cultural ethos of Sanskrit and its tradition was reinforced through implementing Hindi over non-Hindi speaking areas: See (1) Sajal Nag: 'Multiplication of nations?', Political economy of subnationalisms in India', Economic and Political Weekly, July17-24,1993; (2) S. V. Rajadurai:1993,Hindu, Hindi, India.(in Tamil),Chennai, chapter IX

<sup>15</sup> Arooran.: op.cit.pp.195-96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

indispensable historic roots and eternity; no other civilisation could challenge the antiquity of Sanskrit'<sup>17</sup>.

Perhaps, it is this attitude of Brahmin/Congress leaders, as it is said above, provided space for the Tamil purist movement and its political manifestation in Tamil nationalism to save and protect the ancient tradition of Tamils from the Hindi/Sanskrit influence. The Tamil purist movement under the leadership of Maraimalai Adigal staged severe protest demonstrations. Adigal and his movement had some ideological differences with Periyar who was one of the tallest leaders of Tamil nationalist movement. Between 1937-40, the first phase of anti-Hindi agitations, both these groups had come together to oppose the imposition of Hindi. Adigal had his ideological genesis in the Saiva Siddhanta. Adigal (1876-1950) was an eminent scholar in Tamil and Saivism. He was a precocious youth and was associated with P. Sundaram Pillai and Somasundara Nayagar in his youth. Acclaimed as the father of Tamil purist movement, which sought to emphasise the independence and self-reliance of the Tamil language and the culture of native Tamil people<sup>18</sup>. One of the primary reasons for the anger of native Tamils would stem from a historical fact that not only Sanskrit, Tamil and Pali also have rich literary tradition. In fact except Tamil the two other languages have virtually disappeared from both public as well as personal domain. Therefore, it became very important for the Tamil nationalist leaders to register their protest in defence of Tamil supremacy.

Before establishing Dravidar Kazhagam in 1944, Periyar found 'Self-Respect

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<sup>17</sup> S. V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha : 1996, op. Cit., pp. 613-14.

<sup>18</sup> See for details, the books authored by Adigal 1926, 'Veelalar nagarigam' (in Tamil), Pallavaram, Chennai and; 1940, Tamilar Samayam (in Tamil), Pallavaram, Chennai.



Movement' which was known for its anti-religious, anti-caste, rationalist interpretations/views. Thus, in the beginning, Periyar came down heavily on the Saivaites' and their philosophical affiliation with Saiva Siddhanta. This bitter rivalry got marginalized with the move of the Congress government to implement Hindi as compulsory. It was in this context, that the self-respect movement and Periyar sought to forge an alliance with the Saivaites. 'We will forget all that you have done before. Bravely come forward now; apart from providing pecuniary help, you should also send your devotees to our side'. In fact, Periyar had declared that 'battle line has been drawn; the war has been announced; already 200-300 youth are ready to embrace martyrdom against the imposition of Hindi. So, be ready and equip yourselves for a war against Hindi and the Brahmin hegemony'<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the motto of modern Tamil society and its construction 'Tamilnadu for Tamil' was raised.

Periyar consistently began to write in his daily 'Kudi Arasu' about the dangers of Hindi and the politics behind Congress leaders and the Brahmins. The support extended by Saivaite scholars like Maraimalai Adigal, K. Subramania Pillai, T.V. Umamaheshwaran Pillai, Pandithamani Kathiresan Chettiar, K. Kandasamy Pillai and S. Somasundara Bharati, helped Periyar to go for a militant agitation. As Arooran observed that Periyar provided political and community leadership, Somasundara Bharati and others provided the literary and cultural leadership for Tamils in the anti-Hindi agitation<sup>20</sup>. The association of Muslim League and some of the ex-Muslim ministers in the Justice party government came out openly to support anti-Hindi

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<sup>19</sup> Venkatachalapathy A.R. : 1995, *Dravidian Movement and saivaites : 1927-1944*, Economic and Political Weekly, April 8, pp. 761-768 and S.V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha : op. Cit., pp. 641-42. Actually, in the editorial of 'Kudi Arasu' (date : 16/6/38), Periyar announced the support extended by M.A. Jinnah, A.T. Pannirselvam, M.C. Raja for anti-Hindi agitation, *ibid*, p. 641.

<sup>20</sup> Arooran : op. Cit., p. 207.

agitations. Periyar himself attended meetings organised by Muslim League in support of the agitations. Thus, a cohesive Tamil community emerged cutting across all barriers--Muslims, depressed sections, and backward castes, with much vigour and deep commitment to fight against Hindi and to protect the sovereignty of native Tamils.

The anti-Hindi agitation took another new turn when women also joined the picketing for the first time in front of the H.T. High School. Speaking in a conference of women volunteers, Periyar exhorted the women to fight for the cause of Tamil language and culture with determinism<sup>21</sup>. As the agitation picked up its momentum, many leaders were arrested, as the Congress-led Brahmin raj came down heavily on the leaders. Periyar was sentenced for one-year rigorous imprisonment. However, the agitation was on, as the people were very persistent in their demand. The struggle got relegated to the background by the middle September 1937, as the World War II was declared. The Congress ministry of Rajaji resigned on 27 October in line with the decision of the Congress Working Committee which protested at the Viceroy's act of declaring India a belligerent country without consulting either central or the provincial governments. Soon after the resignation of Rajaji government Periyar suspended the agitations and offered unconditional support of the Justice Party to Britain in the pursuance of the war and decided to desist from all activities which were likely to distract the attention of the government from its main purpose<sup>22</sup>.

The result of anti-Hindi agitation may be analysed under two main headings, one linguistic/cultural and the other political/communal Tamil language and literature

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> S.V. Rajadurai & V. Geetha, : op. cit.,p. 643.

received the encouragement as a result of the anti-Hindi agitation. Many associations were formed with a view to fostering Tamil studies in different parts of Tamilnadu. The fear that Tamil would suffer as a result of introducing compulsory Hindi became a rallying point for the native Tamils. It was undoubtedly, Periyar who spearheaded the movement. His clear vision as to how the implementation of compulsory Hindi had had its roots in the hegemonizing culture of Brahmins. Periyar announced that 'in order to keep the people more and more superstitious, irrational, the Brahmins are keen on implementing Hindi, thereby they can teach the so-called pride of Sanskrit. At least now, we should awake from sleep; if we fail to do so, we will, for generation and generations, remain Sudras and ati-Sudras<sup>23</sup>. For this anti-Brahmin and anti-Congress campaign, he received the support of M.A. Jinnah. In fact, we could see a close relationship between Periyar and Jinnah. Periyar while endorsing Jinnah's view of two nation theory, said 'Two years of Congress regime, which was so 'Aryan ridden' could not but create a sense of despair in the minds of all non-Aryans. It is but a natural desire on the part of the Muslims to live as a separate nationY Mr. Jinnah's argument for this partition are cogent and unassailable and there is nothing wrong in that claim<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, Jinnah also extended his support to Periyar for his demand of 'Dravidanadu for Dravidians'. On 21<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1940, the government announced that the move to impose Hindi as a compulsory subject would be abolished. Jinnah was the first to send his congratulatory message to Periyar. "Your efforts to prevent (the) Congress government to enforce Hindi upon unwilling people and your sufferings and sacrifices

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid : pp. 648-49.

<sup>24</sup> 'Kudi Arasu', 31 March 1940 quoted in E.Sa. Viswanathan : 1983, The Political Career of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Ravi and Vasanth Publishers, Madras, pp. 274-275.

in that struggle have met with well deserved success. I'm sure that those who suffered will have satisfaction that their great sacrifices were not in vain"<sup>25</sup>.

Thereafter, Periyar began to speak more on the lines of dividing India into three parts: Dravidanadu, Muslim India and Aryan land. In 1940, he declared at a public meeting, "Tamils want to be free from the Brahmin-Baniya domination in cultural, economic and political fields, the only answer was a separate country for the Dravidians"<sup>26</sup>.

In one of the conferences, two resolutions were passed: one supporting Jinnah's two nation doctrine and the other requesting the government to take up the Dravidanadu question along with the League's demand whenever constitutional changes were considered<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, for him, the liberation of the native Tamils would be possible only if they obtain freedom from the Brahmin-Baniya/ Congress dominated India. Thus, the independent Dravidanadu alone could ensure the dignity and self-respect of all native Tamils who are identified as sudras/adi-sudras by the Brahminic texts/puranas.

The fear of Periyar and others became true when Hindi was given the prominent place in the constitution as soon as independence was obtained. Separate country demand was first dismissed by the British and the Congress led Brahmin-Baniya party gave Hindi high status in the constitution. Gandhi was extremely adamant; even just five days before his death he wrote: "Hindustani was to be the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 274.

<sup>26</sup> Ve. Anaimuthu, op. Cit., pp. 498, see for more details, S.V.Rajadurai. & V.Geetha, : op. Cit., Chapter VIII.

<sup>27</sup> Kudi Arasu : 14 April 1940, in Viswanathan : op. Cit., p. 275.

lingua franca--Rashtrabhasha of India<sup>Y</sup>The world outside did not know them as Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, Tamilians, etc., but only as Indians. We must therefore, resolutely discourage all fissiparous tendencies and feel and behave as Indians. Subject to this paramount consideration to a linguistic redistribution of provinces should give an impetus to education and trade<sup>28</sup>.

During the Constituent Assembly debates, representatives from south India strongly criticised the Government's intention which was presented by a Tamil Brahmin N. Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, on behalf of the government. When he said, "I for one, did not easily reach the conclusion that was arrived at the end of these discussions, which involved our bidding goodbye to a language on which I think we have built and achieved our freedom. Though I accept the conclusion that language should be given up in due course and in its place we shall substitute a language of this country, it was not without a pang that I agreed to that decision" {Constituent Assembly Debates, p. 1317}.

One thing we could see from his speech; it was that the majority of the Congress party came from the Hindi speaking areas and to this majority he had to concede that Hindi should become ultimately the official language of the Indian nation. For this conclusion, representatives from south India expressed their extreme disappointment and agony. Ramalinga Chettiar from Madras said, "I appeal again to the Hindi speaking people to give up their attitude of domination and dictation and to adjust themselves" (ibid., p. 1375).

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<sup>28</sup> Gandhi quoted in S. Mohan Kumaramangalam : 1965, India's Language Crisis, New Century Book House (P) Limited, Madras, pp. 21-22.

In the similar style, P.T. Chacko of Travancore--Cochin province, spoke in detail against Hindi's imposition, " I may say that south is feeling frustrated. If there is a feeling of having obtained liberty, freedom and all that, there is very little of it in the south. Sir, coming here to the capital in the northern most part of the country and feeling ourselves as strangers in this land, we do not feel that we are a nation to whom the whole thing belongs, and that the whole country is ours. Unless, steps are taken to make the south feel that they have something to do with the countryY I do not think the south is going to be satisfied at all. There will be a bitter feeling left behind. To what it may lead, it is not easy to say at present" (ibid. pp. 1371-1373). He was followed by Krishnamurty Rao of Mysore also pleaded that "English should continue to be used for a period to be fixed and the question of a national language should be left to the future parliament" (ibid., p. 1394).

All their efforts were ridiculed by the Congress leadership and in the end Part XVII of the Constitution was ultimately adopted. It was on the basis of a compromise between those who stood for the immediate and speediest introduction of Hindi and those who essentially would have preferred the retention of English. Actually, the real weakness, of Part XVII arose not out of the place given to Hindi or the fact that English was retained till 1965, but from the failure to give regional languages their proper Constitutional place<sup>29</sup>.

Part XVII of the Constitution cover articles 343 to 351 of which 345 to 347 form Chapter I, Regional languages of the Union; 345 to 347 form Chapter II, Regional Languages; 348 and 349 form Chapter III, Languages for courts and 350

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

and 351 special directives.

To begin with Article 343 of the Constitution, it is to be noted that it is framed in the most mandatory language: " The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in the Devanagari Script". And by Article 343 (2), English is permitted to continue with a time limit of fifteen years. In contrast, Article 345 of the Constitution, which deals with regional languages, is framed in permissive language:

"Subject to the provisions of Articles 346 and 347 the legislature of a state may adopt a law on any one or more of the languages in use in the state or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the purposes of that state"

Further, Article 344 would tell us the pro-Hindi bias of those who framed it. It says,

"The president shall, at the expiration of five years from the commencement of this Constitution and thereafter at the expiration of ten years from such commencement, by order constitute a commission.."

It shall be the duty of the commission to make recommendations to the President as to "the progressive use of the Hindi language for the official purposes of the Union"

With such decisions and privileges, Hindi became the official language of the Union from 1.1.1950 and a time limit of 15 years was fixed for English to be replaced by Hindi. After that Hindi would become the principal language and English, if a law would be passed under Article 343, would be permitted to continue as a subsidiary official language. At the same time, there is no time limit for the introduction of the regional language as the official language and even after the introduction of the regional languages as the official language of the state, English can continue to be used for official purposes.

Periyar called upon the native Tamils to fight against the discrimination, and said that independent India is basically for the exploiting minority Aryan/Brahmin not for the toiling masses of this subcontinent. Thus, he called upon the people to boycott the Independence Day celebration and declared this day as a "Black Day" for Dravidian Tamils.

Because Periyar had never believed in the identity of Indian and the construction of India. In a way to answer congress leader's logic of Indian swaraj, Indian nation, India's common language, he elaborately spoke in a public meeting on 19.04.1937. He referred to the differences between Gandhi and Nehru in defining swaraj and ridiculed them by saying, 'In August 1937 Gandhi said '...if there is an iota of difference between Britain and India, I'll take any step to resolve the difference even by laying my life'. Periyar sarcastically posed a question to doubt seriously the Pan-Indian identity. He said:

'Russia is a socialist nation; but still there is no common language there. There were no references about any common language in India before the Britishers came. And what is the basis to declare that India is our motherland. When did the name 'India' emerge? What is its boundary? Last year Burma left us; Butan had decided to go independent. Last year, Afghanistan also left. So in the due course of time, many regions had come together and many got divided. Thus, history remains like this! Then what is the rational to call India as motherland. Many countries in Europe, are equal to few districts to us as far as the area is concerned. But they always refer their nation as motherland not the whole Europe<sup>30</sup>.

While vehemently opposing the very construction of Indian nation for its Brahminical exploitative content which was evolved as an alternative British regime, Periyar questioned the role of Hindi. He said, 'Hindi as a language and its culture have

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<sup>30</sup> Kudi Arasu. : 20.4.1937 quoted in S.V.Rajadurai & V. Geetha : op. Cit., pp. 672-73.



always been carrying exploitative content in them; thus they are inherently antagonistic to non-Brahmin native Tamils'. Having realised the hypocrisy of Congress leaders and their excessive celebration of Brahminical traditions/Sanskrit/Hindi, Periyar announced:

While seeing today's political scenario, the only way to keep ourselves with dignity and self-respect would be to divide Tamilnadu from the north. Otherwise, there is no scope for us to remain living with self-respect. I'm quite confident to say, the little amount of self-respect is basically because of our Tamil nationalist feeling and remaining antagonistic to Hindi and its culture. Therefore, the effort to impose Hindi is basically a full-fledged attempt on their part to keep us slaves<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, Periyar gave new impetus to the Tamil nationalist movement during the last decades of colonial regime. His movement proved to be the greatest challenge to the Brahminical/bourgeois construction of India as a nation.

### **Phase- II: Anti-Hindi Agitations (1965)**

In accordance with the provision of Article 343 of the Indian Constitution, the government had decided to replace English by Hindi after fifteen years in 1965. But in this fifteen years, sea change took place in the political scenario. In 1949, Periyar's Dravidar Kazhagam received a disastrous blow, when he, at the age of 72 got married to a 28 year old girl who had been an active member of the party. In a statement giving the reasons for his marriage, he said that as he had no confidence in his lieutenants, he was marrying a girl in whom he had full confidence and trust and who would lead the party after his death<sup>32</sup>. And his order that all members of Dravida

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<sup>31</sup> Kudi Arasu : 16.9.1937 and Ve. Anaimuthu : 1972, op. Cit., pp. 649-655, see also S.V.Rajadurai & V. Geetha : op. Cit., pp. 676-77.

<sup>32</sup> Hardgrave, R.L. : 1965 : The Dravidian Movement, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, p. 33.

Kazhagam (DK) should wear black shirt was also given as a reason for his lieutenants to desert him. There were serious ideological differences between C.N. Annadurai, one of Periyar's chief lieutenants to leave DK besides the above-cited reasons. At the time of partition, Periyar, as mentioned earlier, sought the help of Jinnah, so that Dravidasthan or Dravidanandu might be formed, simultaneously with Pakistan. Jinnah's inadequate support and Britishers outright rejection for separate Dravidanadu, disappointed Periyar. This had caused the transformation of power of the hegemonizing Brahmin oligarchy. His call to boycott independence day celebrations and refusal to honour the national tricolour flag and rejection of Indian constitution did not find expected support and enthusiasm from his own lieutenants. Annadurai, however, saw national independence as the accomplishment of all India, not merely the Aryan north. Periyar refused to listen to him and rejected his demand for democratisation of inner party organisation. The differences became so obvious during 1948 DK conference. Thus, emerged the DMK--Dravidian Progressive Federation--Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The DMK had always been identified with Tamil renaissance, since it had drawn its ideological inspiration from DK/Periyar. DMK leaders were instrumental in popularising 'pure' Tamil in stimulating interests in Tamil literature. The DMK has among its adherents many members of the Tamil literary and scholarly community. Part of the widespread DMK appeal to youth is its identification with Tamil language. It worked, as Bennett says, in two ways : the DMK is involved with Tamil because of the high proportion of young Tamils among its adherents, and it attracts students because of this linguistic stand<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Barnett. S.M. : 1976 : op. Cit., p. 129.

In addition to the above-cited differences between DK and DMK, one of the very vital differences was, Annadurai's notion on religion and nation. From total atheism of DK, DMK adopted very compromising attitude : 'One community and one God' and during the Indo-China war in 1962, as requested by Nehru, Annadurai gave up separate Dravidanadu demand.

In fact, he appealed from the prison to fight against the Chinese aggression. Perhaps, possible ban on such separatist movements by the central government could have forced Annadurai to give up his separation demand.

However, all these differences of opinion got totally marginalised with one announcement of the central government. In accordance with the provisions of article 343 of the Indian Constitution, Hindi would replace English as the official language of the Indian Union on January 26, 1965 (Republic Day). The Official Language Act, however, provided that English might continue for limited official purposes. When Hindi was adopted, the home minister G.L.Nanda, assured the country that the changeover would keep pace with the spread of knowledge in non-Hindi areas. This was not at all convincing for the native Tamils.

Surprisingly, the person who was very much instrumental in the imposition of Hindi as the Premier of Madras Presidency in late 1940s, no longer was in Congress Party. He was one of the main leaders of the conservative Swatantra Party. This party at this time, took up an altogether different stand. Rajaji convened Madras State Anti-Hindi Conference in Thiruchirapalli in January 17, 1965. There, Rajaji lashed out against the central government's policy and proclaimed the determination of Tamil

people to resist Hindi as an "unwise, unjust and discriminatory tyranny"<sup>34</sup>. In protest, DMK decided to observe January 26, 1965 as a day of mourning by flying black flags from party officers and homes of party leaders. As a precautionary measures leading members of DMK were arrested. Nevertheless, clashes between followers and the police occurred. On the same day, a DMK adherent committed suicide by self-immolation, calling his action 'a protest against the imposition of Hindi and a sacrifice at the altar of Tamil'<sup>35</sup>. Within next ten days, six more DMK followers committed suicide. The anti-Hindi 'martyrs' became objects of widespread admiration among the native Tamils. Clashes between DMK followers and police began in large scale from 25<sup>th</sup> January onwards. Massive participation of students added new dimension to the whole struggle. From the beginning of February onward most violent struggle commenced since the Quit India Movement that shook Tamil nadu. Trains, Post Offices, Police Stations, factories, public buildings were attacked. The situation was going out of control as the Chief Minister of Madras Bhaktavachalam, threatened the students and others with 'stern action'. The state government with full blessings from the central government came down heavily on the people who were struggling to protect the sovereignty of Tamil. Ten thousand people were arrested. Countless injuries were sustained and about 70 people killed according to official estimate, but it was 150, claimed DMK.

This mobilisation against the imposition of Hindi once again proved that the Tamil society would never succumb to the politics/policies of the Brahmin-Baniya

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<sup>34</sup> Hardgrave: 1979, Essays in the Political Sociology of South India, Usha Publishers, New Delhi, p.81.

<sup>35</sup> Barnett S.M., 1976, op. cit., 131.

dominated Indian Central government. After seeing unprecedented struggle in Tamil Nadu, the then Prime Minister, Sastri, had to make an announcement reaffirming Nehru's 1958 statement that for "an indefinite periodsY I would have English as associate languageY because I do not wish the people of the non-Hindi areas to feel that certain doors of advancement are closed to themY I would have it as an alternative language as long as people require it, and the decision for that I would leave not to the Hindi-knowing people, but to the non-Hindi knowing people"<sup>36</sup> He subsequently stated certain policy decisions aiming at making Nehru's assurance operational: (1) every state could transact its business in the language of its choice or English; (2) interstate communications could be in English or accompanied by an 'authentic' translation; (3) non-Hindi states could correspond with the centre in English; (4) transactions of business at the central level would be in English; (5) recruitment examinations for central service posts would be in English. In 1960, it was decided that Hindi was to be permitted as an alternative to what Sastri assured the non-Hindi speaking communities that even if Hindi language were an alternative, 'every care would be taken to be ensure that their employment prospect would not be adversely affected'<sup>37</sup>. However, it is not simply the problem relating to job opportunities of educated people. It is in fact, an attempt to hegemonize the non-Hindi speaking people. The caste affiliations in the two categories are quite obvious.

So, protecting Tamil from the 'Hindi Demon' as DMK has characterised, became the most vital rallying point. It became evident from the 1967 election victory for

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<sup>36</sup> Hardgrave, R.L. Jr. : 1965:' The Riots in Tamil Nadu: Problems and Prospects of India's language Crisis'; Asian Survey, 5 August, pp.399-407.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid: p.406.

DMK. Though a few more reasons were cited for DMK's landslide victory such as mismanagement and price hike of essential commodities, the nationalist aspirations did play an important role. The victory of DMK's founder leader Annadurai and others ensured that their apparent association with cinema was not the only source for their great appeal to the people. Therefore, in the post-Independent India, as far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, Tamil nationalistic aspirations do provide the source for the emergence of charismatic leadership.

*Chapter Five*

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## **CONCLUDING REMARK: CONTEXTUALIZING**

### **CHARISMA IN TAMIL NATIONALISM**

The emergence of charismatic leaders and their apparent association with film industry in Tamilnadu both at the level of actors or dialogue writers posed a serious question as to what is the place of film in the emergence of charismatic leaders. The available scholarly literature have echoed the view that cinema does play the primary role in the emergence of charismatic leaders. The previous chapters have delineated the context of modern Tamil society and demonstrated how this context is unique as there was no such similar situations found in other parts of southern India. Therefore, identifying the differentia specifica of Tamil society in the modern period becomes very important. Certain dimensions are identified as unique features/differentia specifica of Tamil society; the prominent among which are the caste question and status of Tamil language. With this understanding we can draw certain conclusions.

#### **Anti-Aryanism Vs Dravidian Nativity**

The first and foremost specificity of Tamil society is discerned in the dichotomy between anti-Aryan sentiment vis-à-vis the Dravidian nativity. The Brahmins are said to be the descendants of Aryans. Thus the dichotomy is posed between Brahmin Vs Dravidian/non-Brahmin Tamil nativity. Host of scholarly works has been produced to declare the anti-caste/anti-Brahmin roots in Tamil society, which can be traced back to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. onwards. Particularly in the modern times, the works of Iyoothidoss Pandithar, Masilamani and others have



attempted to prove that the Brahmins do not belong to native Tamil community and their culture and religion are essentially antithetical to the worldview of the native Tamils. Infact, Periyar in the later period posited that the dichotomy has to be identified as Dravidian Vs Aryan i.e., on racial lines. This is not only a historical fallacy, but would lead us to a highly confused conception, as they are essentially linguistic categories. Periyar's contestation of Brahmin nativity arose from the Brahmin claim that their nationality too is Tamil since they also speak Tamil. However, in the process of identifying the insiders and outsiders in Tamil nation the Brahmins were identified as outsiders by the native Tamils. Moreover the Brahmins are castigated for their alien, exploitative cultural traditions and symbols.

#### **Anti-Hindi-ism Vs Tamil Antiquity.**

The celebration of Tamil literature and its antiquity emerged when Hindi has been identified as the 'national' language of India. It happened during the colonial period itself. Hindi is said to be the descendant of Sanskrit, which is a very ancient language. Therefore, to glorify the Sanskrit tradition and literature, Hindi was chosen as an instrument.

Tamil scholars protested against this notion. Sanskrit is not the only ancient or classical language of India, Tamil and Pali also have such cultural richness and antiquity. More importantly, except Tamil other two languages have disappeared now from the everyday usage. Therefore, the hegemonizing tendencies of Hindi speaking people over Tamil and its culture was considered as internal colonialism.

Therefore, for attaining independence from internal colonialism and from the clutches of Aryan/Brahmin oligarchy, the emergence of Tamil nationalist movement became inevitable. In order to clinch the ideals of Tamil nationalist movement a unique type of leadership emerged. These leaders came to be associated with the Tamil pride and self-respect as against the Aryan/Brahmin. Therefore, by virtue of their position, these leaders enjoyed a great deal of emotional loyalty from their followers. And precisely because of this emotional ties between the leaders and their followers there existed a highly irrational and authoritarian relationship between them. As Weber has described this particular leadership as charismatic and its unstable nature, here too, we are in a position to identify the awe arousing nature of charismatic leadership and its unstable nature. In fact, when charismatic leadership emerges for protecting a highly non-modern or traditional identity, it no way demands the non-modern type of political system. By its very nature, the modern context enforces a highly democratic, participatory political system which many a times charismatic leadership fails to give, though it emerges in a modern context. Having had this understanding about charismatic leadership, we are now in a position to analytically look at the emergence of charismatic leadership in Tamil nationalism.

When a charismatic leader is found capable to carry forward the task, the celebration of his charisma begins. At the same time, when he is found incapable to accomplish the given task, erosion of his charisma also begins. This was true in the case of all charismatic leaders of Tamil nationalist movement. Among those leaders Periyar E.V. Ramasamy comes first. His deep commitment to restore the *suya mariyathai* (Self-Respect) of non-Brahmins ensured him to be

one of the tallest charismatic leaders of Tamil nationalist movement. Subsequently, his vehement attack on caste system or *Varnashrama Dharma* and superstitious beliefs and practices of the people made him one of the greatest champions of social reforms. His leadership role in the uncompromising agitation in Vaikom (Kerala) to get permission for the lower caste people to use temple roads which was previously denied to them by the upper caste people, paved the way for his emergence as unchallengable leader of non-Brahmins emancipation. These incidents, to a great extent, gave the people of Tamilnadu a new hope that Periyar would always fight for justice. His projection of radical, atheistic views as an alternative to highly superstitious, irrational religious system of Brahminical Hinduism was widely admired by the people. His vision for a just, equal society without any kind of exploitation and his absolute determination to clinch those ideals created deep respect for him from the non-Brahmin native Tamils. This tireless crusader *ipso facto* enjoyed a great deal of celebrity.

At the same time, at one point in time, he began to face an erosion in his charismatic appeal. His marriage, at the age of 71 with a 29 years old party worker and naming her as his new successor proved to be one of the fundamental reasons for extreme amount of disillusionment for his party men. It clearly shows his authoritarian approach. In addition to that his explicit appreciation for his friendship with Rajaji, against whom he till very recently unleashed a massive struggle, came to be a point for extreme criticism from his followers. These incidents finally resulted in sudden erosion of his charismatic appeal.

This erosion and the gap were immediately filled by C.N. Annadurai, who was Periyar's chief lieutenant who was known for his oratorical ability and organizational capabilities. In spite of negligible ideological differences between Periyar and Annadurai almost 75 % of DK's rank and file left with Annadurai. His dynamism further attracted many youth. His ideological contestation vis-a-vis the Brahmin oligarchy ensured wide admiration from his followers. His ability to mobilize people in defence of Tamil's supremacy made the people to project Annadurai as another great leader of Tamil nationalist movement. His occupation of Chief Ministership did not leave much scope for his erosion of charismatic appeal, as he served only for 18 months.

The leadership of DMK was appropriated by one of Annadurai's close associate M. Karunanidhi after the former's death. Of course, Karunanidhi has little amount of charismatic appeal as compared to that of Annadurai or Periyar. But still as the leader/President of the Tamil nationalist party he did possess some amount of charisma which also began to erode. This erosion was a result of his inefficient administration and his explicit association with non-Brahmin forward caste.

This erosion got further aggravated with the rise of M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) in the party hierarchy. The already disillusioned people of most backward and lower caste groups were looking for an appropriate leader within Tamil nationalist stream. Thus, MGR's new party rose to power in the state. Till his death, he remained an unchallenged leader of the party. In spite of leading one of the highly corrupt administrations and coming from non-Tamil background, he managed to keep his charismatic appeal intact.

Surprisingly, many of the available scholarly studies on the emergence of charismatic leadership seem to have given less importance to the complexities of modern Tamil society and Tamil nationalist movement. They tend to, perhaps unwittingly, reduce everything to the realm of film. It is true that except Periyar other three leaders were associated with cinema either as a dialogue writer or an actor. In fact, their association with cinema did not ensure their full-fledged commitment to only cinema. In other words, these leaders have used the potentials of cinema for mobilization and creating an awareness among the people. It is observed already, the scholarly literature strongly suggest that it was cinema, which produced charismatic leaders.

The rise of Tamil nationalist party, the DMK, according to this view was essentially due to the popularity of some of its leaders who were associated with cinema. This understanding of Robert Hardgrave goes as far as to give primacy to the emergence of MGR as a charismatic leader. Sara Dickey also endorses a similar view. Her opinion that of cinema creates and preserves the widely publicized, dynamic and attractive images for person-centered politics however is not sustainable. In the same way the arguments of Pandian for the emergence of MGR as charismatic leader would remain a highly disputable one. His view is that the emergence of MGR as charismatic leader is due to the fragmented common sense nature of subaltern classes needs to be contested. Because, the fragmented nature of common sense of subaltern classes is not exclusive to Tamilnadu. Further, we could see a great deal of similarity in character formation, narration of the story and the importance of the role played by hero in cinemas produced in almost all Indian language movies. But, surprisingly in

other linguistic regions including southern languages, the consistency of the emergence of charismatic leadership is missing as compared with Tamil society.

It is now quite clear that the *differentia specifica* or certain unique attributes of modern Tamil society did not find their roots in other societies. Therefore, a sweeping conclusion that cinema plays a primary role in the emergence of charismatic leadership is not only invalid, but a historical fallacy as well. Inadequate appreciation of this historical complexity made scholars like Pamela Price to conclude that the political behaviour of modern Tamil society retains its pre-modern, kingly models<sup>1</sup>. It is quite obvious that she did not probe deep enough into the context from which such leadership pattern emerges. Essentially, it is the vibrant Tamil nationalist movement which, remains the pivot of many social changes in modern Tamil society, including the emergence of charismatic leadership. As Barnett opines it is not the leaders who gave birth to the Tamil national movement but it was the movement which produced the leaders<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately this dimension is missing in many of the scholarly works. If we do not have this understanding which recognizes the dialectical relationship between the leadership and Tamil nationalism, we would be incorrect.

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Price: 1989, 'Kingly Models in Indian Political Behaviour: Culture as a medium of History', *Asian Survey*, 29.6, pp. 559-623.

<sup>2</sup> S.M. Barnett, op. cit., p. 167.

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