

**Caste, Class, Gender and Nationalism: Adi-Dravida Intellectual Traditions
in Tamilnadu, 1890-1970**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “Caste, Class, Gender and Nationalism: Adi-Dravida Intellectual Traditions in Tamilnadu, 1890-1970” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is an original work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

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

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Dedicated to

*All the people who are Struggling to
save the Constitution*

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INTRODUCTION

The Adi-Dravida¹ movement was primarily an anti-caste movement which emerged during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in colonial Madras. This movement which began with the fundamental motive of socio-religious reform, took a political turn from the 1920's. This study is a project of intellectual history of the Adi-Dravida movement in TamilNadu from 1890 to 1970. The proposed research would delve into the Adi-Dravida movement, its discourses on caste, class and gender and their responses to nationalism. This interrogation of a period of 80 years of the movement will delve into the socio-political circumstances which led to the emergence of the movement, the historical factors which transformed it into a political movement in the 1920's, the intellectual debates within the movement and with other contemporary social and political movements on the issues of caste, gender, nationalism and labour, how these debates shaped the Adi-Dravida movement and the influence of these ideas on the politics of modern Tamil Nadu.

The 1990's witnessed the emergence of Dalit studies as a discipline. It was a result of not only an increased academic engagement of Dalit and non-Dalit scholars with the studies and research on the marginalized community, but also the impact of the political assertion of the Dalits from the 1970's onwards which reflected in the academic sphere as well. The authors of the recently published

¹ Adi-Dravida is a generic identity, used for all the untouchable communities. The term came into vogue since the late 19th century and in 1922 the Government of Madras officially accepted this identity. These communities were also called as Pariah, Panchama, Schedules castes, Harijan, etc. The term 'Dalit' can be considered a modern day terminology equal to Adi-Dravida.

book titled *Dalit Studies*, opine that there were five broad trends which made Dalit studies possible. The reasons were the political and intellectual controversy over the Mandal committee recommendations, the rise of new Dalit activism in South India, political and electoral interventions of the BSP, the rise of Dalit feminism in India and the global discussions on race, caste and social exclusions, for example the Durban conference in 2001.² The increased engagement of scholars in the studies of the marginalised communities brought about a paradigm shift in the dominant academic discourses.

History as a discipline was primarily dominated by the nationalist historiography for a considerable period. Works produced by nationalist historians approached Indian history from a simplistic binary of colonialism versus nationalism. This approach to history was problematic as it subsumed various other recalcitrant movements into the ambit of Indian nationalism, though many of these movements were antagonistic to the Congress led national movement. Indian historiographical writings have failed to recognize the struggles of the Adi-Dravida communities against untouchability and upper caste domination as it did not fit into the scheme of nationalism. Few nationalist authors have acknowledged the existence of these movements but have portrayed the movements as sectarian and pro-British and hence anti-national.³ The idea of Indian civilization as conceptualized by nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore was essentially that of a caste Hindu framework in which the untouchables or other

² Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (ed), *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, p. 4.

³ibid., p.8.

marginalized communities did not figure in the imaginary as contributors in the nation making process.⁴

The 1970's saw the emergence of Marxist school of thought. The Marxist school had a considerable impact in the academic sphere. It questioned the basic premises of nationalist historiography, but from the perspective of class. The Marxists saw class as the primary contradiction in the society, but did not have a sufficient outlook on the study of caste as a phenomena.⁵ Though the Marxist scholars critiqued the nationalist discourse of history writing, they were not completely antagonistic to the Indian national movement. Similar to the nationalist scholars, the Marxist historiography too largely characterized colonialism as an unitary power structure and homogeneous, as the primary enemy and as the sole reason for the economic and social backwardness of the country. Dalit scholars have contested this view by opining that such an unitary viewpoint fails to see the Dalit struggles for dignity and self-respect as well as the promises and possibilities of colonial modernity.⁶

A major shift in history writing happened with the emergence of subaltern studies school in the 1980s. The subaltern scholars spoke about “history from below” and about “history of the historyless”. Founding their basic premises on the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's political thought, the term ‘subaltern’ denoted the people who were excluded from the established structures of the

⁴ibid., p.11.

⁵Yagati Chinna Rao, ‘The Idea of Subalternity and Dalit Exclusion in India’, (Unpublished paper), p.4.

⁶Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (ed), *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, p. 10.

society for political representation, the voices which went unheard in society and it were the same groups whose history and identity were not a subject of interest to academicians which the subaltern scholars sought to unearth.⁷ Similar to the Marxist school, the subaltern scholars too failed to raise fundamental issues related to the historical experiences of the untouchable communities. Yagati Chinna Rao says that, “the concept of subaltern, subalternity or subaltern studies got imported to India through upper-caste, western educated intelligentsia, but one hardly finds the application of the concept, method, or approach to real subalterns of the Indian society. Although voluminous works that was produced under the banner, one finds it difficult to find the ‘real-subaltern’ of Indian society for them neither as subject nor as an object.”⁸

Nationalism: Mainstream, Subaltern and the Dalit Perspectives

‘Nation’ has been a category which has been widely contested, debated and theorized by scholars the world over. Nationalism as an ideology originated in Europe, its ideas derived from the philosophy of enlightenment and claimed to have a universal applicability. This argument of ‘universal applicability’ in the context of the colonial countries was challenged by the Subaltern Studies group which came into prominence in the 1980’s led by Ranajit Guha.⁹ Guha took a position that history of Indian society cannot be written without understanding local specificities. His work was influenced by Marxist understanding of European

⁷ Yagati Chinna Rao, ‘The Idea of Subalternity and Dalit Exclusion in India’, op.cit., p.2.

⁸ ibid., p.6.

⁹ Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies: Volume I*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996. (First published in 1982)

history where the bourgeoisie provided leadership to other deprived classes like the peasantry and the emerging working class against the feudal landlords. However, in the case of Indian society the bourgeoisie and the feudal classes struck a compromise during the colonial intervention and led the struggle towards culminating in ‘national independence’.¹⁰

Many scholars researching on caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc, have based their arguments on this hypothesis and produced histories of these different categories which primarily remained outside the purview of conventional historical accounts. Sumit Sarkar argues, “A narrative dominated by the idea that imperial rule was overcome by nationalist struggle becomes a kind of discursive hegemony and leads towards a singular history that leaves out or distorts subaltern histories that are various and diverse.”¹¹ The Subaltern school termed the established ways of history writing as ‘elite’ and more importantly it gave the people standing outside the official accounts an agency autonomous from that of the elites.

Taking this as the base, subaltern studies scholar Partha Chatterjee have developed a framework to understand colonial studies encounter with ‘modernity’. According to him, the elite histories have often concentrated on showing similarities between the development of the Indian society and the European one and thus the focus had always been on the heroic role of the bourgeoisie in the formation of the nation and the setting up of parliamentary democracy. Chatterjee

¹⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983.

¹¹ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadesi Movement in Bengal, 1903 – 1908*, Permanent Black, Bangalore, 2010, pp. xiv-xv.

contradicts these accounts by arguing that “Our” modernity is different from western modernity. The concept of ‘difference’ central to his argument is the idea that the nationalist elites carved out a separate sphere which was supposed to contain elements from the private sphere, for example, family. Interestingly and logically the burden of showing the difference in the domestic or private sphere had to be carried out by ‘women’. This theoretical premise gave rise to new forms of history writing.¹²

The Dalit studies perspective attributes the emergence of Indian nationalism to the everyday humiliation experienced by the English educated Indian elites under colonial rule. Dalit scholars points out to their personal experiences of humiliation of the nationalist leaders in the hands of the colonial masters which provided impetus for them to lead the national movement.¹³ According to the Dalit studies, it was not merely the economic inequities which formed the basis of Indian nationalism rather the social and cultural exclusion faced by the middle class Indians which led them to launch the nationalist struggle. Scholars of the Dalit movement derive their theory mainly from the Dalit vernacular narratives of the colonial period.¹⁴ According to the Dalit vernacular literatures the category of humiliation is conceptualized not merely as personal but also as informing social and political processes like nationalism and Dalit struggles for personal and political dignity. They view struggles of the Dalit

¹² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997. See also his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

¹³ Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (ed), *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2.

communities as fight against the humiliation the untouchables had to face for centuries due to the discriminatory caste Hindu practices prevalent in the Indian society. According to Dalit scholars, the struggles of these historically marginalized communities against untouchability and upper caste domination is not only a political project but also a historiographical one too.

For decades before the emergence of Dalit studies, Indian historiography was strongly influenced by the Gandhian 'Harijan' ideology. In this framework the image of the untouchables became synonymous with the powerful stereotype of a 'bhangi' (manual scavengers). Due to this, other prominent Dalit lives were removed from discussion and the figure of a stigmatized victim became dominant and hence the need for reform from above became the approach to the Dalit question. This became the reason for the absence of systematic engagements with Dalits as historical and political actors and denied them any form of agency. Gandhi did not engage with any of the struggles of the untouchable communities for self-respect and against the discriminatory caste Hindu practice which rendered Dalits merely as objects of reforms.¹⁵ The other dominant approach in academic writings on Indian nationalist movement as discussed earlier was the view point of the simple binary of colonialism versus nationalism. These dominant trends in Indian historiography kept the Dalit question out of the ambit of Indian academic writings for a considerable period of time.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶ Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (ed), *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016.

Review of Select Literature

There has been decent corpus of works produced on the questions of caste, class, gender and nationalism in the Indian context. But the paucity is seen when these questions are related to the depressed classes and in particular to the context of Tamil Nadu. This section would review some of the literature which have been produced on the themes of this study and largely confined to Tamil Nadu.

M S S Pandian in his paper compares upper caste and lower caste autobiographies to explain his hypothesis on the engagement of lower castes with modernity. Pandian argues that the upper caste autobiographies portray speaking about caste as confining oneself into a ‘pre-modern realm’. He further argues that the upper caste autobiographies talk about caste by ‘other means’ whereas the lower caste autobiographies discuss caste as a ‘relational identity’.¹⁷ The nationalist culture during the colonial period, Pandian contends came to be represented by the Hindu upper-caste belief systems which meant the exclusion and inferiorization of the various subaltern groups. This according to Pandian, meant anything non-representative of the upper caste Brahminical culture was pre-modern. During the postcolonial period the author says that a basis for a modern nation state would not recognize the existence of different communities, but many communities defied this logic and there remained persistent tensions. The idea of upper caste cultures to be representative of the national culture during the colonial period and attempts at projecting India as a single homogenous community in the postcolonial times, according to Pandian resulted in the ‘competing sets of

¹⁷ M.S.S. Pandian, ‘One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 18, (May 4-10, 2002), pp. 1735-1741.

languages'. He argues for the unsettling of boundaries of the spiritual and material realm which would create space for the language of caste in the postcolonial public sphere. Pandian uses the framework based on the binary of Brahmin and non-Brahmin for his analysis. This does not address the issue of the middle caste aspirations which emerged due to certain socio-historical conditions which have to be studied. Pandian argues that the upper caste writings intentionally kept caste outside the public domain, however there was considerable production of lower caste literature in Tamil Nadu and caste remained intrinsic to the political discourse.

Aloysius traces the history of the Buddhist movement which emerged during the last two decades of the 19th century. The author contends that the movement was started by Iyothee Thass Panditar and it gave primacy for education to the untouchable communities and propagation of its ideas through print.¹⁸ He identifies the forming of the Saikhya Buddhist society (1898), starting of the weekly journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan* (1907) and beginning of panchama schools in association with Col. Olcott and Annie Besant of the Theosophical society as steps taken in this direction. Aloysius argues that the re-reading of classical Tamil texts by Iyothee Thass convinced him that the Adi-Dravidas were originally Buddhists during the ancient period and historically had been in constant conflict with the Brahmins which eventually rendered them the status of untouchables in the Tamil society. The author says that the movement gave a call for conversion to Buddhism and it spread to other parts of south India during the

¹⁸ G. Aloysius, *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement Among the Tamils Under Colonialism*, New Age International, New Delhi, 1998.

first two decades of the twentieth century. Aloysius also points out that the death of Iyothee Thass in 1914, stunted the growth of the Buddhist movement and its presence was limited to certain pockets wherever it found able leaders to carry forward the movement. The activists of the movement later went on to become recruits of the Self-Respect movement. Though this movement weakened in the long run, it would be interesting to trace its impact on the social movements which emerged later in Tamil Nadu.

Dealing with the aspect of caste and secularism, Rupa Viswanath in her article contends that the policy of ‘religious neutrality’ of the colonial government which set precedence for the post-colonial secular Indian state was invoked effectively by the rural landed elites to prohibit the governmental welfare measures from benefitting the untouchable ‘pariah’ community.¹⁹ She argues that the landed upper caste elite pitted the Hindu pariahs against the Christian pariahs to prevent communal land being owned by an untouchable community. The author says that for the first time registered in an administrative precedence, the upper castes claimed that the pariahs, who were until then excluded from the Hindu religious order, to be ‘Hindus’. Rupa Viswanath cites that it is not usually the judiciary which set the precedence; rather it was the petty officials in the administration who sided with local elites in disputes concerning the implementation of welfare measures for the pariahs. She relates to how these insufficient aspects of ‘religious neutrality’ practiced by the colonial rule reflects

¹⁹ Rupa Viswanath, ‘Spiritual Slavery, Material Malaise: ‘Untouchables’ and Religious Neutrality in Colonial South India’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 83, No. 219, (February 2010), pp. 124-145.

in the policies of the present day 'secular' Indian state when it withdraws ameliorative aids for dalits who covert out of Hinduism.

Tracing the emergence and trajectory of the Adi-Dravida movement, Raj Sekhar Basu opines that introduction of colonial education for the untouchable communities, large scale migration and activities of the Christian missionaries to be key historical factors which enabled the Adi-Dravida politics to assert itself in Tamil Nadu.²⁰ According to the author, the Adi-Dravidas emerged as a conscious political force during the post-world war period. Investigating the crucial period of Adi-Dravida politics, Basu contends that Adi-Dravidas initially supported the non-Brahmin Justice party as there were efforts by the Justicites to co-opt the depressed classes into the non-Brahmin bloc. But this cooperation, Basu argues did not last long because the elite non-Brahmin upper caste leadership of the Justice party failed to address the grievances of the Adi-Dravidas adequately. As far as the attitude of the untouchable communities towards the Congress was concerned, he says that it was of antagonism, because the Brahmin leadership of Congress had neglected their problems. During the 1920's and 30's, the author argues that there were moves by the Adi-Dravidas to maintain a distinct socio-political identity through social movements seeking to repudiate the logic of hierarchical Hindu social order. Basu further argues that despite such developments the Adi-Dravidas did not organize as a single representative party or association because of varying political affiliations of their leaders. He concludes that they ended up supporting different movements of Adi-Dravidas at different

²⁰ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010.

junctures and also the movement was at loss of momentum and leadership towards the later part of the 1940's.

Researching in the same area, Gajendran Ayyathurai delves deeper into the ideas of Iyothee Thass and the Buddhist movement. Like other 19th century Indian thinkers Thass too ponders into the realms of Rationalism and Humanism.²¹ Ayyathurai says, for Thass, caste system was against humanity and Brahmins were the people who propagated and established the system, hence Brahmins and Brahminism were against humanity. According to Ayyathurai, Thass urged the use of modern technological innovations and advances, though western, as it was useful to mankind. Thass mocks the Brahmins saying that though they had control over the knowledge system for centuries there are no useful inventions or innovations, whereas they have concentrated their whole energy in maintaining the caste system and other regressive Brahminical religious practices which hinders the advancement of society. According to the author, Thass finds 'generosity' in the British creation of free hospitals, drought relief, free resting places, etc and attacks caste and religion for the collapse of generosity, because aggression between different castes and religions is the reality. The author says that Thass urged people to question everything and not take anything on face value. Similar to Aloysius, Ayyathurai too opines that Thass after his reading of the classical texts, found Buddhism to be the primary reason for the later emergence of the caste system and he locates the rivalry between the Parayars and Brahmins as actually the rivalry between Buddhism and Brahminism.

²¹ Gajendran Ayyathurai, *Foundation of Anti-caste consciousness: PanditIyotheeThass, Tamil Buddhism and the Marginalized in South India*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2011.

The preceding paragraphs have dealt with works produced by the English academia on the Adi-Dravida movement in TamilNadu. However, for a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual traditions of the movement, it is necessary to study the works produced in the vernacular. T.P. Kamalanathan's work is one of the significant studies,²² which has traced the history of the Adi-Dravidas from ancient till contemporary. When the ruling class which got hold of the Indus valley, when they spread towards the Ganges valley, the people already co-habiting the region, he argues, were persons belonging to the 'Dravidian' race. He further argues that, a part of the population mingled with the Indus populace and the rest who resisted the aggression, were treated as slaves and untouchables. They were made to live outside the villages and banished into forests and pushed further towards the southern part of India. The author claims, that the population which did not mingle with the Indus valley people, are the pure Dravidian race and hence inferring that the Adi-Dravidas who were considered untouchables, are the original Dravidians. This book by Kamalanathan is a rebuttal to K. Veeramani, President of the Dravidar Kazhagam. Veeramani in one of his articles in the magazine 'Dalit Voice' in 1984 argued that, beware of Brahmins, as they are the ones dividing Dalits and other backward classes. Kamalanathan counters factually as to how historically it has been only the Dalits who have fought the Brahmins culturally and socially and how the Shudras have very much become part of the Hindu fold. He in fact says that, in rural areas, the Shudras are the muscle men for the Brahmins, who not only save Brahmins from attacks of the Adi-Dravidas, but also exploit them materially and socially claiming higher status in the caste

²² T.P. Kamalanathan, *Dalit Viduthalaiyum Dravida Iyakamum: Maraikkappadum Unmaikalum Karaipadintha Athiyayangalum*, Ezhuthu, Madurai, 2009.

hierarchy. Kamalanathan further says that, the term 'non-Brahmin' and unity under this banner is a flawed concept, as it is the non-Brahmin castes who have oppressed the untouchables in Tamil Nadu. This work traces the entire trajectory of the emergence and growth of the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu, explaining meticulously how the depressed classes have a history of their own, their leaders, how they are fighting casteism and how they are capable enough to fight for themselves.

J. Balasubramaniam in his research on the history of Dalit journalism, traces how print culture led to news and messages to reach faster and wider to people. He says, in many parts of the world print media played a crucial role in bringing about socio-political changes. The colonial period in India saw the emergence of a public sphere, due to the introduction of print media. However, the Indian public sphere, according to Balasubramaniam was not all inclusive, as lower castes were not given space in the print media.²³ Adi-Dravidas then started newspapers and magazines of their own, to make their voices and demands heard. Two major strands could be seen in early print media history in Tamil Nadu, firstly the nationalist magazines which were primarily dominated by brahmins and other upper-castes, second were the magazines of the non-Brahmin Dravidian movement. The studies on Tamil journalism have concentrated on these two strands, whereas, Dalit journalism has been completely neglected by academics. According to Balasubramaniam, the connection between caste and journalism could be seen from 1850's onwards. The role of Christian missionaries was crucial

²³ J. Balasubramaniam, *Sooryodhayam Mudhal Udhayasooriyan Varai: Dalit Ithazhkal 1869-1943*, Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, Nagercoil, 2017.

in this regard. The upper-castes started magazines in order to maintain their social superiority and their power relations with the British. By the end of 19th century, Dalits and other middle-castes too started magazines of their own, for the welfare of these castes and to petition to the British. Caste associations of the lower-castes too were formed during this period. The 1891 Census of India, led to the enumeration of castes. The British tried to codify thousands of castes within the Varna fold. In Tamil Nadu until then, the castes which had never imagined themselves within the Varna fold, wanted to place themselves highest within the Hindu Varna order. In order to justify their claims, they cited classical texts and oral traditions, all of which were brought out in print form. New caste histories were written and printed. In order to take these claim among the masses, new magazines were started. The author finds that, during the period of this study (1869-1943), 42 Dalit magazines were started. He says, some of the individuals who started these magazines were also prominent leaders in the political sphere. Balasubramaniam adds that, these magazines not only were used to petition to the British government, regarding their education, jobs, civil disabilities, etc., but it also helped in a major way for the emergence of the Adi-Dravida political movement in colonial Tamil Nadu.

The historiography of gender is wide ranging. The diverse debates on gender primarily reflect on the facets of past centuries' struggle over the "women question". Anandhi argues that the question of women's empowerment found a radical content in the ideas and activities of E V Ramasamy (popularly known as Periyar, henceforth EVR) during the self-respect phase of the Dravidian

movement.²⁴ She says, EVR questioned the basic pillars of patriarchy like monogamous family and norms of chastity prescribed and enforced upon women. Anandhi points out that EVR criticized the Tamil language as ‘barbaric’, “as it did not have respectable words for women” and he called for total rejection of the regressive elements of the Tamil past. The author elucidates that ‘Self-Respect marriages’ and conferences held at provincial and district levels on a large scale were used “as regular political sites to take up women’s issues and to encourage women’s political participation”. But with the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), Anandhi contends, the radical ideas gave way to common patriarchal norms and because of this women lost their agency within the movement. She criticizes the Self-Respect movement of failing to create anti-patriarchal consciousness amongst its cadres.

Similar to Anandhi, C S Lakshmi points to the shift in the radical posture on the women’s question after the formation of the DK.²⁵ Lakshmi complicates Partha Chatterjee’s argument about the nationalist characterization of the cultural domain as inside/outside and women as protectors of the private domain. She argues that the boundaries of the inside and outside are blurred. The author contends that the nature of the activities of women functioning in the public domain were somehow integrated into the logic of what is termed feminine to portray it as a continuation of her historical and cultural role. Lakshmi says that women in the Self-Respect movement primarily fought against the Brahminical

²⁴ S. Anandhi , ‘Women’s Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No. 5/6, (May- Jun., 1991), pp. 24-41.

²⁵ C. S. Lakshmi, ‘Bodies Called Women: Some Thoughts on Gender, Ethnicity and Nation’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 46, (Nov. 15-21, 1997), pp. 2953-2962.

values in the society and the imposition of Hindi language. She identifies that the women in the Self-Respect movement were anti-caste, anti-god and anti-ritual and differentiates them from the women activists in the national movement who were working within the wider conceptualization of the nation. The author elucidates that the women activists in the national movement were working within the “chastity-wifeness-motherhood” framework. According to Lakshmi, Congress functioned as a family and Gandhi was a paternal figure for all its activists.

Speaking on the emergence of scholarship on the contemporary study of gender, the authors say that, “The nationalist movement to overthrow the British included a significant component of resistance at the level of symbolic representation and formal knowledge construction, and these knowledge systems inspire some of the work on gender. Post-independence social change driven by ideas of development within the current phase of globalization, in which state and international economic and political interests often intersect to erode local autonomy, has spawned work from Marxist, socialist, and a variety of other gender perspectives. The current theoretical controversies, methodologies, and analyses of gender illustrate how Indian perspectives on multiple inequalities intersect with similar knowledge developed in other countries.”²⁶

Both Anandhi and Lakshmi have dealt with the Dravidian movement and women’s question. But there is an absence of literature when it comes to talking about the political activism of women from Adi-Dravida communities. When gender was a crucial aspect of EVR’s Dravidian nationalism, it would be

²⁶ Bandana Purkayastha, Mangala Subramaniam, Manisha Desai and Sunita Bose, ‘The Study of Gender in India: A Partial Review’, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 4, (August, 2003), pp. 503-524.

interesting to study the response of the Adi-Dravida intellectuals on the discourses of gender. The role played by women belonging to Adi-Dravida community in the politics of modern Tamil Nadu will be a new area which this research would delve into.

The question of nationalism became a conflicting phenomenon in late colonial Tamil Nadu. The well-established ideas of Indian nationalism championed by the Congress were challenged by the Self-Respect/Dravidian movement. The Dravidian movement put forward the demand of a separate 'Dravidanadu', a Dravidian homeland, which primarily encompassed the present day five south Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Seemandhra and Telangana. The idea of Dravidanadu was formulated as a critique of the mainstream nationalism. EVR identified caste and patriarchy as major barriers in the formation of an Indian nation state. M S S Pandian's writing on EVR's concept of nation says, "In short, with citizenship being invested with singular primacy in EVR's discourse on the nation, it was, for him, the moment of equality of the subordinate social groups with rest of the nation alone which could signify the arrival of the nation."²⁷ In contradiction to the theories of nationalism, EVR's nationalism did not valorize the ancient Tamil past. He in fact called the Tamil language 'barbaric'. EVR found the past as a hurdle for the Tamil society to progress. EVR's idea of Dravidian nationalism was primarily anti-Brahmin, anti-god, anti-Congress and anti-Gandhi. Pandian in another article argues that EVR's idea of nation did not confine to any specific boundaries or formulate any strict

²⁷ M. S. S. Pandian, "'Denationalising' the Past: 'Nation' in E. V. Ramasamy's Political Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 42 (Oct. 16, 1993), p. 2283.

rules for membership of a nation which are criteria deemed essential by scholars of nationalism. To illustrate this Pandian quotes EVR, “If Japanese accept there is no inequality based on birth and opposes practices which are based on such inequality; we can accept him as Dravidian.”²⁸

From the literatures reviewed, it can be seen that the questions of caste and gender are susceptible to transformation in accordance to the socio-historical changes that societies undergo. There are governmental and non-governmental actors who play a role in this transformation. Generally, the Dravidian movement finds a place in researches relating to caste and gender while the Adi-Dravida movement does not. Even studies relating to the women’s question and the Dravidian movement stops in the year 1945. Post 1945 is a period in Tamil Nadu which remains to be explored in relation to the issue of gender. To have a better perspective, it is necessary to understand these processes in the specific political context of Tamil Nadu during the period of this study.

The Socio-Political Milieu in Tamil Nadu, 1890-1970

The Madras presidency was the southernmost region of the Indian subcontinent which was under the British dominion. The presidency constituted the present day four south Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, parts of Karnataka and Kerala. The colonial administrative measures and certain other historical events during the 19th century gave rise to socio-religious and political movements in the presidency. Some of the well-known movements that emerged during the colonial period are the Saivite movement, the Adi-Dravida movement, nationalist

²⁸ R. Cheran, Darshan Ambalavanar, Chevla Kanaganayakam (ed), *New Demarcations: Essays in Tamil Studies*, Canada, 2008, p. 18.

movement, Dravidian movement and the communist movement. This section would be an anecdotal narrative of the socio-historical circumstances which led to the emergence of the Adi-Dravida movement and also the important political developments in TamilNadu during the period of this study.

The British government brought about a number of administrative and economic reforms with the establishment of the colonial rule. Though the colonial policies were not specifically aimed at improving the status of the historically excluded untouchable communities, it did benefit the depressed classes in certain ways. The three main historical factors which aided the emergence of the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu can be located in the effects of the introduction of education by the colonial government, missionary activities and large scale migration. With the introduction and expansion of education to cover the Adi-Dravida communities, the possibilities of employment outside agriculture also expanded.

Large scale migrations occurred in two phases - one during the famine of 1877 and the other during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Predominantly people belonging to the southern peninsular region of the Indian subcontinent migrated to work as indentured labourers in the plantations abroad in countries like Malaysia, South Africa, Caribbean Islands, etc. Periodic famines, the oppressive caste system, better employment, etc, were some of the reasons for such large scale migration.²⁹ It should also be noted that the overwhelming majority of the migrants belonged to the untouchable communities. These

²⁹ For details, Raj SekharBasu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu, 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010.

migrations made the depressed classes slightly independent from the caste Hindus in terms of employment with the decrease in dependence on land and the land lord. Moreover, when these migrants returned, some of them returned with savings which they used to buy land, dealing a further blow to land relations. This led to a partial weakening of the feudal structure. It was in the background of this social and economic upheaval that the Adi-Dravida movement emerged as a political force.³⁰

In the Tamil region, Iyothee Thass Panditar provided an early impetus for the Adi-Dravida movement in the 1880s.³¹ Iyothee Thass's interpretation about the Aryan invasion was similar to that of Phule. The Brahmins were considered to be outsiders. They were seen as Aryans who had invaded and hegemonized the socio-cultural-political space of the 'Dravidian' Tamil land and it was argued that the Adi-Dravida's were the original inhabitants of the Tamil region.³² Iyothee Thass began a weekly journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan* with an average circulation³³ of 500 and appeared until his death in 1914.³³ The starting of this weekly journal and beginning of panchama schools in association with Col. Olcott and Annie Besant of the Theosophical society were some of the steps taken by Iyothee Thass in the process for upliftment of the Dalit communities.³⁴

³⁰ This data was taken from the text of an exhibition on Transnational Migrations of Tamil Labourers during the Colonial period conducted at the French Institute, Pondicherry. The exhibition was titled "*Parpala Theevinum Paraviya Ivvelia Tamizhsadi*".

³¹ V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, 'Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), p. 2091.

³² *ibid.*, p. 2092.

³³ Nalini Rajan, *21st Century Journalism in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2007.

³⁴ V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, 'Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), pp. 2091-2092.

Iyothee Thass assigned a Buddhist creed to the Adi-Dravida's and began a movement for their conversion to Buddhism as he saw it as an emancipatory process by which the untouchable communities could be rid from the clutches of the caste ridden Hindu society.³⁵ He valorized the ancient Dalit past deriving from the classical Tamil texts and accused the upper caste Brahmins for the wretched position of the untouchables in the society.³⁶ Through this movement, Iyothee Thass vigorously propagated the 'reconversion' to Buddhism and the Saikhya Buddhist Society was formed in 1898.³⁷ The movement was alive and had far reach in various parts of the presidency till 1914, the year Iyothee Thass passed away. With his death the Buddhist movement became confined to few regions like the Kolar Gold Fields and parts of north Arcot district. Further on, the activists of the movement went on to become recruits of the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement.³⁸ Nevertheless Iyothee Thass and the Buddhist movement were successful in creating the social conscience among the Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu which the later leaders of the movement could build upon.

Rettaimalai Sreenivasan was another Adi-Dravida intellectual who began his activism in 1890's in TamilNadu. In 1891 Sreenivasan found the Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha. He started a weekly magazine 'Paraiyan' in 1893.³⁹ Unlike Iyothee Thass, Sreenivasan's was primarily a political mobilization of the Adi-

³⁵ G. Aloysius, *Dalit –Subaltern Emergence in Religio-Cultural Subjectivity: IyotheeThassar and Emancipatory Buddhism*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 22-23.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.21.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.22.

³⁸ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 225.

³⁹ Rettaimalai Sreenivasan, Diwan Bahadur Rettaimalai Sreenivasan Avargal Than Varalaru, TamilKudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009, p. 6.

Dravida's rather than on socio-religious lines. He mobilized the untouchable communities on the issues of civil disabilities faced by them, led delegations and filed a number of petitions with the colonial government.⁴⁰ His primary focus was on the education of the depressed classes and on using modern colonial institutions like printing press for the propagation of his ideas. In 1900, Rettaimalai Sreenivasan travelled to England to put forth the downtrodden conditions of the depressed classes in front of the British government. He eventually ended up in South Africa where he stayed for sixteen years during which he became a close aide of Gandhi.⁴¹ Even in South Africa he continued his activities for the upliftment of the depressed classes as majority of the Indian migrant labourers belonged to the untouchable communities from South India. He returned to India in 1921 where he immediately started his activities among the depressed classes for which he was nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in the year 1923. He was conferred the title of Rao Bahadur in the year 1936.⁴² He was one of the two representatives of the depressed classes in the Round Table Conferences, other being B R Ambedkar.⁴³ The agitations by Sreenivasan were instrumental for securing the representation of the depressed classes in the different legislative and other local bodies, in beginning schools and hostels for Adi-Dravida's, removal of

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴³ Dr. B.R.Ambedkar (1891-1956) can be considered one of the leading individuals during the colonial India. Hailing from a Dalit community, Ambedkar had taken the issue of the Dalits in Indian political scenario and fought for their emancipation. He was the Chairman of the Constitution Draft Committee formed to write the Indian Constitution and was a lifelong crusader against the orthodox Brahminical practices of caste, untouchability and discrimination.

various Civil disabilities, etc. He passed away in 1945 until which he continued to be a member of the Madras Legislative Council.⁴⁴

By the time the Adi-Dravida appeared on to the political scene in 1920, they had to confront with movements and ideologies of diverse nature preexistent in the Tamil political sphere. The political changes which were happening at the national level impacted Tamil Nadu as well. With the Congress entering into an 'extremist' phase, the demand for 'Swaraj' intensified. The emergence of Gandhi into the political scene and his methods of protests provided impetus to the independence movement. The programs of Gandhi were carried out efficiently by his able lieutenants in the Madras presidency. By the 1920s the sentiments of Indian nationalism was at its peak and the Adi-Dravida movement had to confront an ideology which it was not much comfortable with.

One another dominant ideology which the Adi-Dravida movement had to confront was the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement whose impact was predominantly in the Tamil region of the Madras presidency. The non-Brahmin movement started off as an anti-caste movement against the overarching dominance of the Brahmin community in the socio-political and economic life of TamilNadu. A few of the influential upper caste non-Brahmin elites in the Madras presidency came together and formed the Justice party in the year 1917. This was the first major political expression of the anti-Brahmin sentiments prevalent in the Madras presidency. The Justicites participated in the electoral process. They demanded separate non-Brahmin electorates, reservation for non-Brahmin

⁴⁴ Rettaimalai Sreenivasan, Diwan Bahadur Rettaimalai Sreenivasan Avargal Than Varalaru, TamilKudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009.

communities in jobs, etc. They won the first elections in 1920 which was conducted under the rules of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. The Justice party won comfortably as the Congress boycotted the elections. They won again in the next elections held in 1923. But in 1926 some Congressmen decided to contest elections to the Madras Municipal Corporation in which the Justice Party was defeated.⁴⁵ They did achieve a few of their demands while in power, but could not sustain the momentum and lost the elections in which the Congress emerged victorious. Though not in power, they could influence the colonial government on certain issues, because of their anti-Congress/pro-British position. The Justice Party also laid the foundation for the Self-Respect movement to emerge under the leadership of E V R.

Non-Brahmin politics got added impetus when E V R formed the Self-Respect movement in the year 1925. E V R was a staunch nationalist Congressman before starting the Self-Respect league. He quit Congress because of the Brahmin domination within the movement and ideological differences with Gandhi.⁴⁶ The self-respect ideology of E V R included the critique of god, religion, patriarchy, Indian nationalism, Congress and Gandhi.⁴⁷ In the early 1930's E V R had a short sojourn with socialism and during this period he worked in close association with communists like Singaravelu Chettiar and Jeevanandam. Together they founded the Self-Respect Socialist party, the political wing of the

⁴⁵ J.B.P. More, *Rise and Fall of the 'Dravidian' Justice Party, 1916-1946*, Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, Kerala, 2009. Pp. 26-34.

⁴⁶ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965. Pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ M. S. S. Pandian, "'Denationalising' the Past: 'Nation' in E. V. Ramasamy's Political Discourse", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 42 (Oct. 16, 1993), p. 2282.

Self-Respect movement. The movement actively propagated the ideas of socialism.⁴⁸ This is an important phase in the history of socialism in Tamil Nadu, as the ideology had a widespread reach. It would be interesting to study the debates surrounding the activities of the Self-Respect Socialist party. This socialist wing was dismantled because of threat from the colonial government of a ban on the Self-Respect movement and the internal differences that surfaced after taking a leftist turn. E V R eventually abandoned the socialist path.

Later on, the Self-Respect movement merged with the Justice Party and in the year 1944 E V R began a new outfit called the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). The DK vociferously put forward the demand of a separate Dravidanadu. But the movement saw a further split when some of the able lieutenants of E V R, like Annadurai, Nedunchezhiyan, E V K Sampath, Karunanidhi and others in 1949 left the DK and floated a new political party called the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The period after 1949 saw a steady growth of DMK. During the phase of DMK's political mobilization, the language question assumed primacy over issues of caste and gender. In 1957, the DMK for the first time contested the general elections, in which it emerged the second largest party in the state dislodging the communist party from that position.⁴⁹ Ten years later the DMK formed the government in Tamil Nadu emerging as the single largest party.

There were other movements which originated around the same period primarily class based in character namely the labour movement and the Communist movement. In contrast to the Dravidian movement, the left movement

⁴⁸K. Murugesan and C.S. Subramanyam, *Singaravelu: First Communist in South India*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1975.

⁴⁹ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965.

emerged from within the nationalist movement. The radical minded nationalists within the Congress who were disillusioned with Gandhian methods of struggle were attracted to the radical content of Marxism. Similar to other regions of the country, it was the nationalists in Tamil Nadu who initially took to Marxism. The Russian revolution of 1917 and ideas of a state governed by the proletariat kindled the curiosity of the nationalists. It was the nationalists who initially formed the first labour unions in the Madras presidency. The Madras Labour Union (MLU), which was the first organized labour union in the country was formed in the Madras presidency in 1918. The first May Day celebration in India was held in Madras presidency in the year 1923 led by Singaravelu Chetti who is popularly known as the first communist of south India. Singaravelu formed the Labour Kisan Party of India in 1923.⁵⁰

During the 1920's and 30's there was an increase in trade union activities. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed in 1925 at the national level, but its branch in the Madras presidency was formed only in 1936.⁵¹ The strengthening of the left wing within the Congress led to the formation of the Congress Socialist party (CSP) and the communists functioned within the CSP. The CSP also provided the communists a platform to work whenever the communist party was banned by the colonial government. The anti-war stand of the CPI led to its ban for the period from 1938 till 1942. The ban was lifted when the CPI changed its position in support of the war efforts of the British because of the Soviet Union's

⁵⁰ K. Murugesan and C.S. Subramanyam, *Singaravelu: First Communist in South India*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1975.

⁵¹ N. Ramakrishnan, *Tamizhakathil Communist Iyakkathin Thottramum Valarchiyum, 1917-1964*, Vaigai Publishers, Madurai, 2002. P. 145.

entry into the war.⁵² The ban was imposed once again in 1945 which was withdrawn only after independence.

The post-independence story of the communist movement is of highs and lows. In 1948 the CPI gave a call for an armed rebellion against the state. An armed struggle broke out against the oppressive Nizam's rule in the princely state of Telangana. This led to the ban on CPI once again and the Telangana armed struggle was thwarted by the newly formed Congress government. The ban on CPI which was imposed in 1948 was removed only in 1951 when the CPI changed its line of "People's War" to participate in the electoral democracy.⁵³ The first general elections in India were held in the year 1952. In the Madras presidency the party won in 63 constituencies and in the Tamil speaking region it won in 14 constituencies. The CPI was the second largest party in the assembly as Congress party came first. After reorganization of the states on linguistic lines in 1956, the second general elections were held in 1957. This was for the first time the DMK decided to participate in the electoral process. The DMK emerged the second largest party and the Congress formed the government again. Ever since the first elections in 1952, the CPI had faced steady decline electorally.⁵⁴ At the same time there were bickering internal differences within the CPI which led to its split in 1964, when a section of the leadership broke away to form the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPI(M)).

⁵² Shashi Bairathi, *Communism and Nationalism in India: A Study of Inter-Relationship, 1919-1947*, Anamika Prakashan, New Delhi, 1987. p. 186.

⁵³ Selig S. Harrison, 'Caste and the Andhra Communists', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2, (June, 1956), pp. 390-392.

⁵⁴ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965.

During this period of intense political tumult there emerged another leader of depressed classes - M.C Rajah. Born in 1883, Rajah could identify with the afflictions of the outcastes from his own experiences. He could comprehend how for ages a vast section of Indian society was excluded and denied of social justice and equal rights in the name of caste system. He realized that education could be an emancipatory force and hence appealed to the government to provide better scholastic opportunities to children from untouchable communities. Rajah's efforts for the education of the depressed classes impressed the colonial government and he was nominated to various committees of government education department. His activities helped in securing scholarships, building hostels for the Adi-Dravidas and also beginning a Dravidian school at Nungambakkam in 1936.⁵⁵

In 1917, M C Rajah led a deputation of the depressed classes from the Madras Presidency to Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. He led another deputation to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Chelmsford in 1919 and was appointed as the honorary Presidency Magistrate in the same year.⁵⁶ He was invited in 1924 to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Public Services and headed a deputation of depressed classes to Lord Goschen, Governor of Madras in 1925. In 1926, Rajah presided over the All India Depressed Classes Leaders' Conference held in the Central Provinces and in the same year he was elected President of the All India Depressed Classes Association. Rajah was appointed as member of the Indian Central Committee which visited England in

⁵⁵ Swaraj Basu(ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 13.

⁵⁶ H. Bhama, *M.C. Rajah - A Study*, An unpublished MPhil dissertation submitted at the Department of History, University of Madras, 1983, p. 7.

1928, in relation to the new political reforms.⁵⁷ Rajah served as a member of the provincial and the central legislative bodies' from 1919-1939, for a period of twenty years. Though he was involved in discussions on a wide range of issues, his primary focus was the issues relating to the depressed classes. He was a powerful voice within the legislators. He was honoured with the title of Rao Bahadur by the collector of Madras on 15th December, 1922 for his immense contribution to the struggle for reclaiming the lost dignity and rights of the untouchable communities.⁵⁸

Apart from his work for making education accessible to the depressed classes, Rajah revived the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in the year 1916. He was made the Honorary Secretary of the organization as well.⁵⁹ This was the same year in which the brewing sentiments of non-brahminism in the Madras presidency manifested itself for the first time into a political formation called the 'Justice Party'.⁶⁰ Initially, earnest efforts were made on behalf of the Justices to incorporate the untouchable communities into the non-brahmin bloc. The positive attitude of the non-brahmin leaders towards issues of the untouchables impressed the Adi-Dravida leaders like Rajah and during the initial years he was among the active organizers of the movement.

But soon fissures emerged between the caste-Hindu dominated Justice Party and the leaders of the depressed classes. The Justice Party won in the first elections in Madras presidency in the year 1920. The partial lack of political will

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ V. Alex, *Perunthalaivar M.C. Rajah Singhanaikal*, Ezhuthu, 2009, p. 17.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ J.B.P. More, *Rise and Fall of the Dravidian Justice Party*, IRIS publications, Kerala, 2009.

on the part of the non-brahmin leaders impeded the aims and objectives of the Ministry. Neither the representatives of the 'untouchables' in the local bodies nor the policies of the Ministry pertaining to elementary education and development of public facilities could satisfy the expectations of the depressed classes. The elite non-brahmin leadership of the Justice Party failed to comprehend their demands and this resulted in failure to build up non-brahmin solidarity.⁶¹ The final detrimental matter was the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills strike in 1921.⁶² The non-cooperation of the Adi-Dravida workers with the strike call created a lot of resentment among the non-Dalit workers of the factory. This eventually took a bloody turn as it led to clashes not only between the workers and police, but between the workers belonging to different communities as well. People belonging to the untouchable communities were targeted across the Madras city and attacks were carried out on them.⁶³

The question of political representation could be said to be the most important issue of the depressed classes' movement during the colonial period. There was overwhelming unanimity amongst the lower caste movements across the country on the question of separate electorates. But fissures emerged between

⁶¹ Raj Sekhar Basu, 'The Making of Adi-Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, p. 19.

⁶² The Buckingham and Carnatic Mill strike was one of the earliest organized protest movements witnessed in Madras Presidency. The strike was declared on 20th June and continued for a period of six months. The strike was supported by the Nationalists as well as the Justice Party. There was widespread discontent among the workers over the low wages and poor working conditions, which led to the B&C Mill trade union giving the strike call. In the course of the struggle the repression of the police on the workers was immense. At the same time the workers were divided on caste lines, as the Adi-Dravida workers refused to join the strike call, which led to brutal communal clashes in Madras city, between the caste-Hindus and Adi-Dravidas.

⁶³ Raj Sekhar Basu, 'The Making of Adi-Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, pp. 23-24.

leaders of the depressed class movement. Rajah who initially supported the demand for separate electorates, after the first round table conference and signing of the unsatisfactory 'minorities pact' shifted in support of joint electorates.⁶⁴ Similarly on the question of religious conversion not only Rajah, other Adi-Dravida leaders too varied from earlier leaders like Iyothee Thass and later Ambedkar on the question of conversion to Buddhism. Many of the leaders belonging to untouchable communities spoke of reforms within the Hindu religion. There were rich and intense debates within the Adi-Dravida movement on important issues like political representation and religious conversion. These debates played a major role in shaping the movement. Studying these debates would be an interesting aspect of this research.

There were other Adi-Dravida leaders like Swami Sahajanandha, K Veeriyar, L C Gurusamy, Pallikonda Krishnasamy, N Sivaraj and others who provided intellectual leadership to the movement. There was one common strand of thought among all the Adi-Dravida leaders that of using all the institutions brought about by colonial modernity. The leaders mentioned above were all members of the legislative bodies at different points in time and also published newspapers and magazines. They petitioned and led delegations regularly to the colonial government and sought redressal to issues confronting the untouchable communities. It is not that all the above mentioned leaders belonged to the same organization. They were members of different political organizations or groups. Though they belonged to different organizations, the cause was common.

⁶⁴ SwarajBasu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p.236.

Research Objectives

- Constructing an intellectual history of the Adi-Dravida movement through the ideas of its leaders and how these thought processes aided the trajectory of the movement.
- Even though the Gandhian nationalist movement addressed the question of untouchability and the Dravidian movement being completely an anti-caste movement, the Adi-Dravida question seems to have missed out by these dominant ideologies. This research attempted to retrieve the history of the 'real-subalterns' in Tamil Nadu.
- The question of labour is intrinsic to the Adi-Dravida politics. It is the lower castes who forms major mass of the work force. Earlier studies suggest that the Adi-Dravidas were the prime sufferers in case of industrial dispute or violence. This study would seek to explore whether the Adi-Dravida political mobilization of workers was based only on caste and how class based issues were addressed by them?
- This study would also attempt to address how the class based mobilizations takes the caste factor into account and their approach towards Adi-Dravida workers in particular during instances of industrial violence or disputes.
- The role of women belonging to Adi-Dravida communities in the politics of TamilNadu. Were there efforts on the part of Adi-Dravida leaders to address questions of patriarchy and increase the participation of women in the movement?

- The participation of Adi-Dravida women in other socio-political movements in TamilNadu during the period. The experiences, space and status of the Adi-Dravida women in these other movements was also be investigated.
- This research will seek to cull out the debates on various issues of caste, class, gender and nationalism within the Adi-Dravida movement and with other contemporary movements of the period.

Chapterisation

This thesis is organized into five main chapters and sixth being the Conclusion.

Chapter I - Myriad Histories of the Adi-Dravidas

The first chapter deals with the early writings on the Adi-Dravidas by the colonial ethnographers, Christian missionaries and lastly by Adi-Dravidas themselves. These writings on Adi-Dravida histories and social life, played a major role in shaping the colonial policy towards the untouchables. These early researches also paved a way for the emergence of the Adi-Dravida political and intellectual consciousness.

Chapter II - Making of the Adi-Dravida Public and the Political in TamilNadu

The second chapter traces the emergence of the Adi-Dravida political movement, its engagement with the politics of Nationalist Congress and the non-Brahmin movement. This chapter deals with the period between 1900 till 1925, when E.V.

Ramasamy launched his Self-Respect movement. This was also the period of emergence and the establishment of the Adi-Dravida political movement. The chapter will study how the movement emerged and the debates surrounding issues of importance to the Adi-Dravidas with the other socio-political movements of the period.

Chapter III - Radicalization of the Tamil Political Sphere and the Adi-Dravida Question

The third chapter studies the period between 1925 to 1937. This period in the history of colonial TamilNadu can be said to be the most radical. The founding of the Self-Respect movement by E.V. Ramasamy, gave added impetus to the brewing sentiments of non-brahminism prevailing in the Tamil society. Also this period saw intense political debates on the question of political representation of the Adi-Dravidas. There were also deep discussions on the question of religion and religious conversion. This chapter will deal with all these debates.

Chapter IV – Depressed Class Politics between 1937-1950

The fourth chapter studies the period from 1937, when Congress formed the Government in Madras Presidency till 1950. This period witnessed the emergence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as a Pan-Indian leader of the depressed classes, which also meant the decline of the indigenous Adi-Dravida traditions in TamilNadu. The Indian independence struggle reached its zenith and how did the Depressed Class engage with all these changes in the political sphere will be the focus of the study.

Chapter V – Post-Independent TamilNadu and the Adi-Dravida Movement, 1950-1970

The fifth studies the political developments in TamilNadu between 1950 to 1970, the Adi-Dravida political movement, the transformation of the movement and the major challenges in front of the Congress and DMK in addressing the question of the untouchables in Tamil Nadu.

Sources

For the proposed research various archival records like government reports, records of the police department, intelligence bureau reports, records of the Ministry of labour, Home department files, Undersecretary safe files, public department, etc, were be looked into. The Christian missionary records are vital source materials for the construction of the history of the Adi-Dravida communities. The intellectuals who come under the purview of this study were all elected representatives to the legislative council; hence the legislative assembly and council debates would be sources of primary importance. The speeches and writings of the Adi-Dravida ideologues on various social and political issues, contemporary and historical, in constructing the Adi-Dravida identity, was be an interesting exercise to engage with. The above mentioned sources are official archival records which forms the basis of historical research methods, which this research also would be pursuing.

Vernacular sources like biographies, autobiographies, Tamil newspapers and magazines published in different districts of the state, short stories, novels, folklore, etc, which would be the primary focus of this research, would provide

wealth of information which largely remains untapped. The fieldwork will also include interviews of activists and leaders belonging to various political movements in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kolar. These interviews would give first-hand information of events which might not be considered as reliable source in conventional historical research, but can be used to corroborate the evidence which will be found from archival sources.

The following are the resource places where material collection had been carried out. The private papers at the National archives and Nehru Memorial and Museum Library, New Delhi. Karnataka state archives and United Theological College (UTC), both in Bangalore. At UTC would be looking into the missionary archives, particularly records of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society(LMS) and Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission(LELM). Then the Madras Christian College library, Gurukul Missionary library, Connemara library, Roja Muttiah library, Anna Arivalayam, and Periyar Thidal all in Chennai. The Dalit Resource Centre (DRC) at the TamilNadu Theological Seminary (TTS) in Madurai and the Jesuit Missionary archives in Kodaikanal will be visited. Number of Tamil magazines and newspapers published during the period by the Adi-Dravida movement and various other socio-political movements will be an important source for the study.

Methodology

This research will be a qualitative work based on archival and government records. Historical researches produced on the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu have heavily relied on sources available only in English. This does not

completely bring out the intellectual trajectory of the movement which was rooted firmly in the localities and villages and the primary medium of communication and mobilization being Tamil. Even the activities in the intellectual sphere was primarily in Tamil. Fieldwork was undertaken traveling to various districts of Tamil Nadu and also Kolar Gold Fields and Bangalore in Karnataka in order to unearth these vernacular sources. So, the primary importance has been on collection of vernacular sources which have been mentioned in the above section. This research has been a library based work and the data gathered was analysed through the methods of textual analysis which includes critical and interpretative reading of sources.

Periodization

This research starts from the year 1890, because 1890's was the beginning of Adi-Dravida intellectual activism. The early Adi-Dravida intellectuals like Iyothee Thass and Rettaimalai Sreenivasan began their social, political and intellectual activism during the 1890's. The study seeks to terminate in the year 1970, because in the year 1967, a Dravidian party (DMK) came to power in Tamil Nadu. From 1967 to 1970 was the initial phase of the DMK government as the first elected DMK Chief Minister of the state passed away in 1969 and Karunanidhi became the next Chief.

Chapter I

MYRIAD HISTORIES OF THE ADI-DRAVIDAS

Intellectual history as a discipline made its presence felt in the Indian historiographical writings during the 1990's. Even though it came to be recognized as an effective mode of writing history, using new tools and methods, there was reluctance on the part of Indian historians to traverse this promising field. It was only with the dawn of the 21st century we could see increased engagement of historians in this field of history writing. They dealt with wide-ranging issues from politics, caste, gender, institutions and associations (political and cultural), individuals, ideas, etc. However, many a time, due to lack of understanding of the discipline, intellectual history got obfuscated into social and political history.¹

The point to be noted is that various issues of social relevance were also the concern of historians, particularly the question of caste which received adequate attention in academic research since the 1980's. Despite this increased interest in the research on caste, the Dalit question still remained elusive in academic researches. It was only after Dalit studies as a discipline emerged during the 1990's,² academicians sensed the necessity to research on the "real-subalterns"³ of the Indian society. It was a result of not only an increased academic engagement of Dalit and non-Dalit scholars with the studies and research on the marginalized community,

¹ Shruti Kapila, Preface to the Journal of *Modern Intellectual History*, Volume 4, Issue 1, April 2007, p.4.

² Ramnarayan S. Rawat, and K. Satyanarayana (ed.), *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, p.3.

³ Yagati Chinna Rao, 'The Idea of Subalternity and Dalit Exclusion in India', Unpublished Paper, p.6.

but also the impact of the political assertion of the Dalits from the 1970's onwards which spilled over into the academic sphere as well. The increased engagement of scholars in the studies of the marginalized communities brought about a paradigm shift in the dominant academic discourses.

Since intellectual history was in its nascent stage and grappling with its own disciplinary moorings, few works produced on the Dalit political thought. In the context of Tamilnadu, only a handful of English academic researchers have explored on the Dalit movement. Among these, works of Gajendran Ayyadurai and Aloysius on the Tamil Buddhist movement deal with the cultural consciousness and the intellectual aspects of the early Dalit movement.

Intellectual History in India

Prof. K.N. Panikkar, a pioneer of intellectual history in India, in late 1980's wrote in his introduction to the special issue of *Studies in History* about the origin and the methodological changes which intellectual history as a discipline underwent over the years. To him, of primary importance was the shift from an early emphasis on the history of thought to the history of man, which meant to integrate different aspects of human life with the origin and development of ideas. He points to the intense intellectual turmoil during the colonial period which led to the emergence of diverse ideologies and an intellectual evolution which was firmly rooted in cultural struggles. He notes that, though sensitive to the social dimension of ideas, historians tended to overlook the cultural milieu. According to Panikkar, most of the indigenous intellectual traditions which emerged were responses to the process of acculturation that was happening as part of the colonial hegemonisation and they

were not uniform in nature as they varied from acceptance and acquiescence to resentment and opposition. The demeaning nature of the colonial acculturation process according to him seemed to disturb the indigenous cultural sensibilities and it can be argued that the diverse intellectual traditions largely grew out of contestation between the traditional and colonial ideologies, though it was an unequal contest⁴. The nineteenth-century witnessed the emergence of various socio-religious movements. Many of these early movements emerged as a response to colonial interference with religion. Panikkar argues that these movements were not a 'conservative' reaction to the modernizing project of colonialism, but rather stemmed from a well-entrenched understanding of the cultural implications of colonial intervention. He points out that various such movements, which developed in different regions of the country, many of them which were confined to a particular region, and short-lived, played a significant role in shaping the socio-cultural perspectives in modern India.⁵

Panikkar developing on his initial formulations, wrote another elaborate article, in which he dealt in detail with the colonial interference with religion and the responses of the colonized.⁶ Moving further, he critiqued the whole notion of Indian variety of secularism, which calls for equal respect of all religions and non-discrimination against all religions. He contends that the religious universalism was the early expression needed to have unity among all religions in a society which was beset by colonial domination. However, this could not withstand religious

⁴ K.N. Panikkar, 'Introduction' *Studies in History*, Vol.3, No.1, 1987, pp.1-8.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁶ K.N. Panikkar, 'Culture and Consciousness in Modern India: A Historical Perspective', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 18, No.4, April 1990, pp.

particularism which became the need of the hour to counter the colonial cultural hegemonisation, which led to the superiority of one religion over another. According to Panikkar, the solution on which secularism could be based on was ‘an all-out critique of religion, with a view to its eventual negation’.⁷ He further argued for separation of faith from culture, which can open up necessary channels of communication. Panikkar goes on to explain in detail and at length about culture and how the Indian cultural conscience was strongly influenced by caste and religion and the dichotomy of public and private life of people was never really true as religion and caste which were assumed to be practices of private sphere, were also integral to activities associated with the public sphere⁸. He further talks about the disjunct between political and cultural struggle, citing the anti-colonial struggle, whereby its growth as political movement resulted in the weakening of many cultural movements. He opines that the backward elements in culture could have been dispensed with only if it had been integrated with the political movement, whereas culture did exist but only as an intrusion into the political struggle. He further observes that because of this lack of integration, the backward aspects of culture not only continued to exist, but also came to dominate the popular imagination.⁹

This article by Panikkar sparked one of the earliest debates on Indian intellectual historiography among historians. M.S.S. Pandian wrote a mordant

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 16

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

article critiquing Panikkar's understanding of Indian intellectual traditions.¹⁰ He starts off by critiquing Panikkar's take on the early 19th century reformers like Rammohan Roy and others and the ideas of 'rationalism' and 'humanism' which Panikkar talks about as the guiding principles of their ideas. Pandian says that Panikkar followed the 'tradition-modernity' approach to study Indian intellectual history which was discredited among Indian historians.¹¹ The progressive elements in the ideas of 'reason' and 'rationality' which Panikkar uses to qualify his arguments, has their own politics, which was the politics of the elite, observes Pandian. Many popular cultural practices, customs and idioms of the subordinate classes were not only suppressed but also subsumed within the cultural practices of dominant classes. Critiquing further, Pandian points to flaws in the basic understanding of Panikkar's historiographical practice. He points out that Panikkar views 'rationality', 'modernity', and 'tradition' as elements which are homogenous in nature, whereas they have internal differentiation and variations across, time, and space. He attributes this lack of understanding to the 'tradition-modernity' paradigm, which Panikkar follows.¹²

Intellectual history ever since then has transgressed disciplinary boundaries and entered new arenas. Historians presently study the global and transnational history of ideas that seeks to set various sophisticated traditions like European, Atlantic, Islamic and Asian intellectual history in the world context.¹³ Shruti Kapila

¹⁰ M.S.S. Pandian, 'Culture and Consciousness: Historiography as Politics', *Social Scientist*, vol.18, no.8/9, 1990, pp. 85-93.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 89.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹³ C.A. Bayly, Afterword to the Journal of *Modern Intellectual History*, Volume 4, Issue 1, April 2007, p.163.

notes that , modern intellectual history in Europe and America grew critiquing the overarching dominance of social history.¹⁴ Intellectual historians consider ideas to be free-flowing and transgressing global boundaries with ease. According to Kapila, these ideas and concepts which travel, operate in particular historical and cultural context gets transformed in the process. She further adds that, further analysis of the process of transformation often provides considerable insights into the concepts themselves. She argues that intellectual history can help to deviate from the teleological ways in which modern Indian history has been written and to also save cultural struggles from simply obfuscated into political history.¹⁵ Despite all the progress intellectual history has made as a discipline and the bright scope it provides in traversing new ways studying modern Indian history, Kapila opines that intellectual history ‘has received little or no attention in the field of colonial and modern South Asia’.¹⁶

Kapila’s arguments though largely true, there are scholars in India and abroad who have taken keen interest in studying the Indian Intellectual Traditions.¹⁷ There has been a specific emphasis on studying ideas which emerged in the pre-

¹⁴ Shruti Kapila, Preface to the Journal of *Modern Intellectual History*, Volume 4, Issue 1, April 2007, p.3.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁷ Rajiv Bhargava, and Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History* (papers of the EPHE seminar), Paris, June 2004; Sheldon Pollock, ‘Is There an Indian Intellectual History?’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 36, No.5-6, 2007; N.N. Vohra, ed., ‘Are There Alternative Modernities’, in *Culture, Democracy, and Development in South Asia*, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, 2001; Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘Ideas of Freedom in Modern India’ in *The Idea of Freedom in Asia and Africa*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002; Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity’, *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, 2005, pp.263-296; Ashish Nandy, ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’, *Alternatives*, Vol. 13, 1998.

colonial period and in the early 19th-century socio-religious movements.¹⁸ The recent studies have started concentrating on other areas of socio-political interest like caste, gender, institutions (political and cultural), religion, etc. With the emergence of Dalit Studies as a discipline,, there have been recent efforts in studying the Dalit cultural and political thought.

As mentioned earlier, although intellectual history has become an established practice in the Indian academic sphere, there are hardly any works on the intellectual history of the Adi-Dravida movement in TamilNadu. This thesis attempts at bridging this gap in historiography. In order to understand the intellectual traditions of the movement, it is important to study the writings on Adi-Dravidas by different actors during the early colonial period. This chapter is an overview of the historical writings on the Adi-Dravidas by colonial ethnographers, Christian missionaries, non-brahmin Dravidian scholars and the Adi-Dravidas themselves.

Colonial Ethnographers

The orientalist writings on caste were influenced by the socio-political changes which were taking place in Indian society before the advent of colonial rule. The common perception among the orientalists, though not a generalization, was that the Hindus were “...prisoners of an inflexibly hierarchical and Brahman-centred value

¹⁸ Ronald Inden, ‘Imperial Purāṇas: Kashmir as Vaiṣṇava Center of the Words’ in Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, Daud Ali, ed., *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000; Patrick Olivelle, ‘The Implicit Audience of Legal Texts in Ancient India’, in Chikafumi Watanabe, Michele Desmarais, and Yoshichika Honda, ed., *Śaṃskṛta-Sādhitā, Goodness of Sanskrit: Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok N. Aklujkar*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2008.

system”.¹⁹ This understanding, strongly influenced the writings of the orientalist on Indian culture, society, history, and politics.

In the early 19th century, the English East India Company, a trading company, had transformed itself into a despotic military rule, a frail one however and were finding it difficult to identify collaborators, to strengthen their possessions in the newly conquered areas. Even as the officials who were usually proficient could not figure out the trustworthy among the locals, it became even more imperative for the company to acquire detailed knowledge of the Indian ‘social’ aspects.²⁰ Caste became a primary factor in all the reportage, which influenced both, official policy and scholarly research and more so after the 1857 revolt, with the establishment of a full-fledged colonial rule, the knowledge gathering process became much more a necessity. Indians were called upon to report about their social, occupational and economic backgrounds.²¹ The all-India decennial census was established in 1871, and in its statistical tables and reports, which ran into many volumes, Indians were classified, counted and ranked by tribe, caste and ethnoreligious community.²² This process by the beginnings of the twentieth century, with a well-established colonial bureaucracy, could cull out tremendous

¹⁹ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001, p. 97.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 98.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

²² Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 9.

reportage, in which 'varna' and 'jati' became the elementary units of identification.²³

The colonial ethnographers tried to analyze the caste system with notions and conceptions that fits to their colonial gaze, since the mid-nineteenth century. It seems most of them were influenced by race theory. According to them, India was not "a self-contained and ethnographically contained other", and certainly did not constitute "a domain of purely localized imperial or strategic significance".²⁴ Despite being derided as orientalists, for depicting India in infantile terms and on the basis of a hierarchical caste order, there were elusive differences in their ways of thinking. Their works were often intellectually more sophisticated than the uniform colonial discourse, that tried to invent or manipulate the ideology, as well as the social implications of this hierarchical system apart from being complex and colorful.

Since the 1860s, with the influence of the western tradition of ethnology, the colonial ethnographers began to exclusively rely on the scientific criterions provided by ethnology, like 'physical character', 'language', 'civilization' and 'religion'.²⁵ They even came out with Darwinian logic, that India was not the domain of a single Hindu race, rather is a land of two separate racial groupings. Additionally, it was believed that the conflicts, migrations and interbreeding

²³ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001, p. 99.

²⁴ Susan Bayly, "'Caste' and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India", in Peter Robb, (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 167.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 189.

involving these two racial groups had divided the subcontinent into zones of separate culture, language and racial type.²⁶

In the colonial period, ethnologists like Walter Elliot had also emphasized the failure of the Hindu mind to project its own ethnography. According to him,, the popular version of a single Hindu race must be rejected. South India was described as an immensely complex ethnological terrain, populated primarily by the non-Aryan Dravidian people, subdivided into at least six groups. Elliot pointed out that “while some of the ‘Pariahs’ possessed fair complexion and tall height, the other members of the same ‘nations’ were ‘black and squat’, with “the lowest and most debased cast of countenance”.

Elliot tried to justify that the inhabitants of the southern peninsula of the Indian subcontinent did not fit into the universal Brahmin-centric principles of purity and pollution. Elliot’s taxonomy was heavily based on racial logic; hence the population was classified according to physiology, moral attributes and the levels of civilization. He saw the lower castes of south India as pre-Aryan in terms of their descent, just like their counterparts in the other regions, and were free and unconstrained by the rules and regulations of caste. It was believed that these caste

²⁶ T.H. Huxley observed that the proper population of the Deccan has no analogue in north-eastern or north-western Asia. He stated that they were long-headed, dark-skinned and dark-eyed men, with wavy black hair. These people spoke Dravidian languages and “where they had been left in their primitive condition, are through savages”. The population of the rest of India exhibited obvious signs of the pale faced Aryans, who stretched from the waters of the Indus to the North Sea “speaking languages allied to the Sanskrit, which forms the basis of all the dialects of civilized India”. See T.H. Huxley, ‘Opening Address’, *Journal of the Ethnographic Society of London*, (n.s) I, (1868-1869), pp. 89-93, cited in Susan Bayly, *ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

groups shared a common ancestry from a single ‘highly civilized’ population, with a distinct ethnological taste for freedom.²⁷

Elliot argued that the Brahminical caste ranking ‘schemes’ are a comparatively recent phenomenon. According to him, most people of south India due to a vigorous racial heritage of nobility, independence, nationhood and republicanism shared strong qualities of libertarianism. So it’s clear that Elliot’s Dravidian taxonomy laid an emphasis on politically defined moral qualities. Elliot’s Dravidian taxonomy comprises of three groups. First one comprises of people who were said to be predatory, such as the Kallars and Maravars of the Poligar country. Second group includes tribes from Konds, who stay in more remote areas than the people of the first group. He calls them the barbarous tribes. He felt that the isolated location allowed the Konds and other members of their group “to retain their nationality”. The third group comprises of the subservient classes who were reduced to a state of servitude and attached to soil as cultivators. As per the ethnographical religious test by Elliot, the second group (which included the Konds) and the third group (which included Paraiyans, Holeyas, Chamars and other slave groups) were ethnologically identical.

To substantiate his arguments further, Elliot highlighted the propensity of human sacrifice among Konds. Kond sacrificial rights founded a primitive version of the rites of buffalo sacrifice, which were believed to be central to the religious life of the servile classes of the third group. So, subservient Chamars and Paraiyan

²⁷ Walter Elliot, ‘On the characteristics of the population of Central and Southern India’, *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, (n.s.) i, 1868-1869, pp. 95-109, cited in, Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001, p. 191.

and the forest-dwelling Konds were all thought to be descendants of a single aboriginal race with bloody sacrificial practices, though they were separated at one point in history.²⁸

Elliot accepted that the clear contrasts between the free forest Konds of the first group and the slaves of the third gathering including the Tamil speaking Paraiyan and Kannada speaking Holeyas, regularly obscured a fundamental racial solidarity, discernable according to the ethnologist. It was accepted that individuals from this extraordinary and various races had comparable physical qualities. He watched, "The Kond and the 'Paria' are fairly beneath... the center tallness... In air they are vivacious, hasty, to some degree touchy and boisterous, yet agreeable; innovative when occupied with work, yet prepared to appreciate inertness and beguilement."²⁹

Indeed, these ethnographical findings were believed to be of great significance. Elliot expressed the opinion that in the aftermath of the mutiny of 1857, the simple truth-telling "free" or "casteless" people of south India had to be recruited in large numbers, both in the army and administration. He also argued that the "pre-Aryan" people of south India had displayed an openness, vis-à-vis, Christianity, that was "the surest road to civilization".³⁰ Finally, he predicted that these Dravidian southerners would prove to be the most assured supporters of the British Raj in India.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Nevertheless, it was assumed that these ethnographic observations were of great importance. Elliot expressed the view that South India's simple truth-telling "free" or "casteless" people had to be recruited in large numbers in both the army and administration following the 1857 mutiny. He also argued that South India's "pre-Aryan" people had shown openness to Christianity. At last, he anticipated that these Dravidian southerners would demonstrate to be the most guaranteed supporters of the British Raj in India.

Missionary Histories of the Adi-Dravidas

During the 1870's TamilNadu witnessed an abrupt and unexpected rise of mass conversions to Christianity.³¹ This had a remarkable impact especially on the lives of the laboring people of rural south India during the colonial period. People were mainly attracted to the Protestant Christian missionaries. It was primarily the untouchable communities who converted voluntarily and the rate of conversion was unprecedented. In these regions, prior to these mass conversions, the missionaries for decades had worked hard, but they found proselytizing activities hard as very few responded to the work of the missionaries. Then there was an unexpected sudden change, with the Adi-Dravidas demanding to be converted, that too in hundreds. This mass conversion had profound effects on the lives of these laboring rural poor since it disturbed the feudal relations and also the caste-state nexus which existed during the period. This overwhelming conversion of the Adi-Dravidas,

³¹ Mass conversions began in Madras Presidency in the late 1870's, especially before, during, and after the Great Famine of 1876-1878. But in the districts north of Madras in which the missions to be mentioned here (the Wesleyan Methodists, the Free Church of Scotland and the American Arcot Mission) worked as major players in publicizing the Pariah Problem, a wave of mass conversions began in 1889 and continued till about 1895.

caused the missionaries to take up several issues of the untouchable communities at a larger scale, making them matter of public concern. A huge corpus of works were produced by the missionaries on the servitude of the Adi-Dravidas in order to make the larger population and also the state sensitive of these issues, which resulted in the state formulating a number of welfare measures, some of which can be even felt till date. This section would deal with the writings of the missionaries of Adi-Dravida histories and problems and how the Adi-Dravida identity and politics came to be constructed.

Prior to the mass conversions, the Protestant missions in south India had minimal interest in the Adi-Dravidas. The missionaries in fact concentrated on the upper-caste elites, because of the predominant understanding that religious change must start with those who are placed on top in the social hierarchy and the actions of the social superiors will be imitated by the social inferiors in the society.³² This top-down approach was also based in an assumption that religious conversion and conviction can be effectively done by a transformation in people's beliefs. Based on this understanding the missionaries spent huge amount of money in educating the upper caste boys, which resulted in a whole generation of well-educated English speaking elites, but only a few converted to Christianity. In addition to this,, the Indian missions were also considered to be a failure in the missionary world. In the 1860's, editor of the popular magazine, *The Harvest Field*, opined that “the barrenness of the Mission-field in India forms a subject of complaint, common and

³² This is a theory of conversion commonly associated with Jesuits and was carried to its logical extreme in South India in seventeenth-century Madurai, by Roberto de Nobili, who donned the garb and adopted the habits of local Brahmins. See Vincent Cronin, *A Pearl to India: the Life of Roberto de Nobili*, Dutton, New York, 1959.

to some extent just.... (On) one side (there are) large sums of money, years of labor, numberless schemes, valuable lives, and on the other, items of result hardly visible amid surrounding masses of heathenism.... All success in Indian missions is *Exceptional*. Results in the field are not so much to be compared as contrasted with the results of Christians toil in other lands.”³³

The missionaries had to contend with the native psyche and understanding of faith, which the missionaries termed as polite indifference on the part of Indians. Even if the locals accept the philosophical merits of Christianity and their position on sin or heaven, they native might simply respond on the basis of Hindu truism that, “All paths are one.” These kind of responses were common and highly frustrating for the missionaries, we find one of the popular Tamil tracts which were published then to counter this understanding titled, “Ellam Onralla” meaning All paths are not one.³⁴ However, there were deeper obstacles that are more relevant to this study, is responses such as, “What you’re saying is good and all, sir, but becoming a Christian means spoiling caste.”³⁵ There was constant denunciation according to Christian Muthiah Pillai, by Hindus of Christianity as a Pariah religion and even if it were caste Christians, they were denounced as Pariahs, as they broke away from caste practices and mingling intimately with the Pariah Christians, hence considered unclean foreigners.³⁶ This led to a lot of frustration among the

³³ ‘Missions Success in India’, *Harvest Field*, August 1862, 217.

³⁴ *Ellam Onralla*, Tamil Handbill 46 (Madras Tract and Book Society, 1881). This was also a common theme in the “Answers to Objections” column of the Tamil Christian monthly *Cattiyatutan*, published by the Christian Literature Society’s Madras branch in the late 1880’s.

³⁵ The rusticity of the retort was recorded with phonetic precision by the Tamil preacher G. D. Barnabas in a village in North Arcot: *Vetiyar Vilakku: The Tamil Preacher’s Magazine*, April 1917, 54.

³⁶ Muthiah Pillai, E., *Kristavarkalin Akramam, Kurumar Potakamum*, Palayamkottai, 1894.

missionaries, they were extremely disturbed and because the missionaries were not able to win Indian souls on a regular basis, this led to the European public losing interest in Indian affairs.

However, once the mass movement had started things started looking up for the missionaries, but they had to face two exigent circumstances. First, the movement which spread among the Adi-Dravidas via kinship and caste networks, led to an unexpected increase in the demands for baptism from a growing number of Adi-Dravidas, expecting attractive possibilities of altering the labour regimes. Second was the interest shown by the missionaries in mass conversions which required funds for which the missionaries contemplated possible solutions. Wesleyan missionary William Goudie proposed that the missions should adjust their methods to the public's demands for numbers.³⁷ Missionaries also realized that they had to justify the consequences of their intervention in the lives Adi-Dravidas. It was the spiritual realm that was the only rightful remit and not the realm of the spirit. This justificatory discourse stemmed from their understanding of the Adi-Dravida motives for conversion. Since the Adi-Dravidas were poor, hungry and oppressed and were expected that they cannot think much beyond the alleviation of their immediate conditions, hence it was judged that the motives of the Adi-Dravidas was not purely spiritual. Missionaries henceforth stressed primarily on the need for Adi-

³⁷ Goudie stationed in Chingleput District, became a legendary champion of the Pariah both at home and in Madras, as we shall see, and also later became general secretary of the Methodist Mission. He served for twenty-five years in India, between 1881 and 1905, and is still remembered and celebrated in the village of Ikkadu, as well in the Chingleput town of Tiruvallur, the mission's district headquarters; several Church of South India schools are named after him. As James Lewis, Goudie's biographer, nicely puts it, "the Pariah" was "the great cause to which Goudie gave the whole of his Indian life." J. Lewis, *William Goudie*, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London, 1923.

Dravida spiritual salvation and identified spiritual degradation as more essential to the hardships of the untouchables than their material privations. With this focus on the Adi-Dravidas spiritual transformation and with their own commitments to social difference, missionaries sought for Adi-Dravidas not primarily the emancipation from their agrarian slavery, but a gentler, less oriental servitude. Since it was identified that the focus was on the spiritual inner transformation, missionaries argued that the problem was within the Adi-Dravida himself. Hence, self-improvement and grooming of better personal habits became the concern and there were programs launched for this purpose.

This understanding a direct impact when conflicts emerged between converted Adi-Dravidas and others.. Whenever tensions emerged between the landlords and the converted Christian Adi-Dravida labourers, it was often projected by the missionaries as religious persecution. This is how the missionaries set the narrative as their role and the new converts in an ongoing biblical epic. Yet there are missionary narratives which themselves provide proofs against their own narratives. Whenever there emerged a violent conflict between the landed caste Hindus and the Adi-Dravidas, it is the Christian Adi-Dravidas as well as the non-Christian Adi-Dravidas who are jointly affected by the violence, which is in direct contradiction with the missionary narratives . The record of Adi-Dravida lives, the details of agrarian production and the relation of Adi-Dravidas with the landed castes, the minute records of all these are maintained by the missionaries. Missionary records become a very important source to study the rural caste relations

and that too a one which often contradicts the narratives of the colonial state.³⁸ Compared to colonial officials, the missionaries would spend decades in villages, whereas colonial officials would spend only three to five years. The colonial officers rarely learned any of the native languages beyond its rudimentary form and relied heavily on interpreters, whereas missionaries often learned the native languages fluently in order to make a stronger bonding with the locals. The British officers usually visited the villages on a horseback and would not get down of the horses in Adi-Dravida settlements and largely depended on intermediaries for such matters. The missionaries, on the other hand, would spend most of their time in Adi-Dravida settlements which are set apart from the main village. Many of the missionaries took interest in ethnographic study of the patterns of livelihood, cropping techniques, land tenure, irrigation, yield, food scarcity and labour regimes. This data is very important as it is the only source which would contradict the data provided by the state.³⁹ It is only from William Goudie's letters, an ardent and one of the earliest champion of the cause of the Adi-Dravidas, who resided in Chingleput district for more than forty years, we get to know that when scarcity of food became a problem, the Adi-Dravida families would feed on an entire a cactus, which is usually fed to

³⁸ Although historians of missions have repeatedly and persuasively underscored the conflating missions and imperial designs is a mistake, an appreciation for the complexity of the relationship between missions and imperial regimes has still not become a matter of academic common sense for south Asianist historians. For an excellent and comprehensive account of the sometimes tense, sometimes sympathetic relations between British missions and the British Empire.

³⁹ One noted pastor, the Scotman Rev. Adam Andrew, spent years of his life experimenting with various technical innovations such as the Persian wheel-which he single-handedly introduced to the region-with the aim of increasing productivity and lightening the Pariah laborer's load. His outspoken advocacy of the Pariah earned him snide condescension from Indian elites, conveyed in the epithet they coined for him, "Pariah Andrew".

the cattle. This Goudie found out after checking the excreta of the Adi-Dravidas since he could observe bright red seeds in it due to indigestion.⁴⁰

Conversion of the Adi-Dravidas

A major famine called Great Famine struck India, particularly parts of south India, in 1876-1878. Missionaries took up actively relief work during the famine in non-official capacity as well as in collaboration with the colonial state, by manning famine labour camps, shelters and feeding houses, which brought the missionaries into close contact with a large section of the rural population.⁴¹ Missionaries won over a lot Adi-Dravidas through mass conversion, before, during and after their work during the famine.⁴² The period between 1880-1905 witnessed a huge corpus of writings produced on the Adi-Dravidas by the missionaries, instigated by the mass conversions during the famine, and the ethical dilemmas they faced regarding material aid provided to the potential converts, and also because of the earlier neglect on the issue of lower-caste conversions.

Missionary reflections on the Adi-Dravida evangelization was motivated by the theological concern with delimiting and defining the religious realm which confined their interventions, as it was seen regarding caste in the church. Even individual missionaries had differences regarding the nature of exemptions which

⁴⁰ William Goudie, letter to Rev. Findlay, June 20, 1901, WMMS (SOAS), London.

⁴¹ For example, BPR 1701, April 16, 1877, TNSA, remarks on the work of Dr. W. Scudder of the American Arcot Mission.

⁴² It is important to note that any link between famine and mass movements per se is weak. Dick Kooiman convincingly makes this argument, analyzing data from mass movements in close historical proximity to the Great Famine of 1876-1878: Dick Kooiman, 'Mass Movement, Famine and Epidemic: A Study in Interrelationship', *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 2, 1991, pp. 281-301. The important consideration for our purpose is that mass movements in Madras occurred very often in times unaffected by famine or epidemic.

could be permitted and they were in agreement that intervention outside the religious realm required serious justifications. It was Rev. Goudie while in the course of offering such a justification, which could be considered as the base understanding that, “(as) a rule, it is no part of a missionary’s duty to improve the material condition of the people.”⁴³ This understanding would be tested during the famine, but even more so by the Adi-Dravidas. Famines although, by nature were exceptional, it was unclear on how to formulate an adequate policy with respect to a class of persons who, lived under conditions of deprivation that seemed to demand material intervention.

These understandings went on to shape the colonial state in multifarious ways. The colonial state whenever they devised welfare schemes for the Adi-Dravidas, in both formulation and implementation, depended on the missionaries, and this dependency on missionaries only increased with time. Similar to the case of the missionaries, the colonial state too had delimitation when it came to the domain of religion, but for different reasons, as it was pledged that the state would avoid religion in accordance with the mandate of religious neutrality. The state machinery and the missionaries, worked together, trying to work out a project to understand as to how religion would be understood in relation to the Adi-Dravidas. Thus we see in reference to caste, how the domain of religion was delimited to the missionaries, permitting only certain kind of interventions. In devising more specific forms of pastoral care targeted to the Adi-Dravidas, religion would come to be defined in reference to motives, especially motives for conversion.

⁴³ Rev. William Goudie, ‘The Missionaries and the Pariah Land Problem’, *Harvest Field*, July 1893-December 1894, p. 536.

Missionaries were strict examiners of their own motives and viewed the would-be Adi-Dravida converts motives with immense suspicion, and believed that impoverished Adi-Dravidas might accept to convert merely for temporal reasons like food and material benefits and not for spiritual reasons.. Apart from their own faith and consciousness, they were also wary about their fellow missionaries who were watchful of other missionaries] and whether anyone is compromising on the basic principles to attain quick success and get more converts. The domain of religion in the nineteenth century was defined by efforts of missionaries to determine the legitimate boundaries of their own intervention, and it largely depended on the analysis of the Adi-Dravida motive and the exoneration of their own.

At an 1879 conference, missionaries framed their worries regarding the provisions of material aid as an aspect of broader theological anxiety regarding the warrant for missionary involvement in temporal life.⁴⁴ On the one hand, only activities directly connected to spiritual transformation, such as preaching, were accepted by missionaries as being incontestably within their purview.⁴⁵ Yet Christian acts of love, such as the provisions of charity, might also be accepted as a legitimate although indirect means of evangelism under certain circumstances. For instance, when the receiver of the gift did not have conversion in mind. Thus, Bishop Sargent of the Church Missionary Society described how he circulated “a direct appeal to parties who had benefitted by Christian liberality, contrasting in this

⁴⁴ *The Missionary Conference*, vol. 1, 1879, pp. 30-67.

⁴⁵ The view that preaching was the most fundamental and direct means of communicating the gospel resulted in heated debates in missionary circles regarding the validity of educational work.

respect the influence of Christianity as a religion of love, with the influence of heathenism, and inviting (them) on this ground as one reason to forsake idolatry and become Christians. A good number did so.”⁴⁶ Sargent emphasizes here that those benefitting from his expression of his “Christian liberality” did not do so with any thoughts of conversion. Rather, liberality was only an object lesson that could be spelled out, after the fact, for heathens. Even if the charity did attract converts for the wrong reasons, missionaries reasoned that however much such converts were perhaps initially driven to Christ by material considerations, their spiritual transformation could be successfully wrought under suitable tutelage.

In short, the missionaries faced a dilemma: they ought scrupulously to avoid the danger that they were overstepping the bounds of their spiritual role by undertaking works of charity that induced conversion, which could result in conversions being seen as a result of material transaction. The battle for converts between Roman Catholics and Protestants in south India led to frequent and bitter denunciations of Catholic “sheep-stealing”, pointing at the immoral inducements provided for conversion. As Henriette Bugge puts it, “To be labeled a supporter of rice Christians (a derogatory epithet for impoverished Christians assumed to have converted for ‘temporal’ reasons) was...one of the harshest criticisms one could raise against a missionary society in south India.”⁴⁷ But equally, it befitted the Protestant missionaries to provide Indians with object lessons in Christian love and

⁴⁶ Rt. Rev. Bishop Sargent, First Paper: New Converts, *In the Missionary Conference*, Vol. 1, 1879, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁷ Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society: Social and Religious Change in South India, 1840-1900*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 1994, p. 44.

charity.⁴⁸ To reconcile these opposed demands, missionaries made a crucial distinction between material aid, which they defined as aid in the form of money, and other forms of assistance.

While delivering a paper titled “How to Deal with New Converts in Things Temporal”, Rev. Jared Scudder of the American Arcot Mission evokes the distinction between monetary and nonmonetary aid, explaining the particular hazards attendant upon giving money thus: “It is not difficult to see that...(the giving of money) must issue in economical evils which are far more easily prevented than cured... The missionary should always... lead his Christian adherents to rely for support on their own labour rather than assistance... indiscriminate... almsgiving... has and must always have a tendency... to undermine both the power and the will to save, thus removing one of the strongest inducements to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness.”⁴⁹ Of importance here is the role assigned to the labour of Christian converts in transforming more than just his material condition. Properly directed labour would promote the habits of thrift and sobriety that Indian conditions (particularly the caste system and the devaluation of manual labour) intended to discourage.⁵⁰ The convert was expected to remain a servile laborer, as we have seen, but Rev. Scudder enjoins him to invigorate his labour with a new spirit, a “sobriety” that would lead “consequently to happiness.”

⁴⁸ It is interesting that the protestant missionaries do indeed seem to have become exemplars for natives in this regard. The first Tamil novel, *Piratapa Midhaliyar Sarithiram*, written by Roman Catholic Mayuram Vettainayakam Pillai in 1896, exhorts Indians to provide relief for the poor during famines as Protestant missionaries do.

⁴⁹ *The Missioanry Conference*, Vol. 1, 1879, pp. 54-58.

⁵⁰ The caste system and the devaluation of manual labor were, for many missionaries, the cause of India’s stagnation-ideas which of course some administrators shared.

Self-Narrated Histories of the Adi-Dravidas

In the Tamil region, Iyothee Thass Panditar provided an early impetus for the Adi-Dravida movement in the 1880s.⁵¹ Iyothee Thass born in Nilagiri in Coimbatore district, was a Siddha doctor (an indigenous medical practice) by profession. He was a well-read individual and was deeply concerned about the downtrodden condition of the Pariahs in society. His urge to work for the upliftment of the depressed classes, made him shift to Madras city during the 1880s, where he continued his profession and also began his intellectual activism. The Madras city space and the developmental aspects associated with colonial modernity provided him opportunities to carry forward his activities. This also marked the beginning of the Adi-Dravida intellectual traditions in TamilNadu.

Iyothee Thass's interpretation of the Aryan invasion was similar to that of Phule.⁵² The Brahmins were considered to be outsiders. They were seen as Aryans who had invaded and hegemonized the socio-cultural-political space of the 'Dravidian' Tamil land and he argued that the Adi-Dravida's were the original inhabitants of the Tamil region.⁵³ Iyothee Thass began a weekly journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan* which had an average circulation of 500 and was published until his death in 1914.⁵⁴ The starting of this weekly journal and beginning of panchama schools in

⁵¹ V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, 'Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39, 1993, p. 2091.

⁵² Jyotiba Phule (11 April 1827 -28 November 1890) was an anti-caste social reformer, writer and thinker from Maharashtra. He was first one to start a school for lower caste girls in India. He worked for eradication of untouchability, Caste-system and also for women's emancipation. He and his followers formed Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of Seekers of Truth) in 1873

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 2092.

⁵⁴ Nalini Rajan, *21st Century Journalism in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2007.

association with Col. Olcott and Annie Besant of the Theosophical society were some of the many steps taken by Iyothee Thass for upliftment of the Dalit communities.⁵⁵

Iyothee Thass assigned a Buddhist creed to the Adi-Dravida's and began a movement for their conversion to Buddhism as he saw it as an emancipatory process by which the untouchable communities could be saved from the clutches of the caste ridden Hindu society.⁵⁶ He valorized the ancient Dalit past deriving from the classical Tamil texts and accused the upper caste Brahmins for the wretched position of the untouchables in the society.⁵⁷ Through this movement, Iyothee Thass vigorously propagated the 'reconversion' to Buddhism and the Saikhya Buddhist Society was formed in 1898.⁵⁸ The movement was alive and had a reach in various parts of the presidency till 1914, the year Iyothee Thass passed away. With his death, the Buddhist movement became confined to few regions like the Kolar Gold Fields and parts of North Arcot district. Further on, the activists of the movement went on to become recruits of the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement.⁵⁹

M.S.S. Pandian argues that Iyothee Thass was primarily a religio-cultural critique, who contrasted the existing Brahmin of colonial TamilNadu with a notional idealized Brahmin, who were originally Buddhists. Pandian further adds that this

⁵⁵ V. Geetha and S. V. Rajadurai, 'Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), pp. 2091-2092.

⁵⁶ G. Aloysius, *Dalit –Subaltern Emergence in Religio-Cultural Subjectivity: IyotheeThassar and Emancipatory Buddhism*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.21.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.22.

⁵⁹ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 225.

kind of critique valorized the Brahmin and had the implication of actually degrading Dravidian practices.⁶⁰ Differing from Pandian, this work would argue that Iyothee Thass though a religio-cultural critique, was clear about the oppressive and discriminatory character of the Brahmins. Iyothee Thass and his Buddhist movement successfully created the social conscience among the Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, which laid the foundation on which later leaders of the movement emerged.

Around the same period, Rettaimalai Sreenivasan another Adi-Dravida intellectual began his activism in TamilNadu. In 1891 Sreenivasan found the Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha. He started a weekly magazine 'Paraiyan' in 1893.⁶¹ Unlike Iyothee Thass, Sreenivasan primarily focused on political issues confronting the Adi-Dravida's rather than socio-religious reform. He mobilized untouchables against civil disabilities faced by them, led delegations and filed number of petitions with the colonial government. His primary focus was the education of the depressed classes and ensuring that the welfare measures of the colonial government reached the needy. In 1900, Rettaimalai Sreenivasan travelled to England to put forth the downtrodden conditions of the depressed classes in front of the British government. He eventually ended up in South Africa where he stayed for sixteen years during which he became a close aide of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Even in South Africa he continued his activism for improving the living conditions of the depressed classes since a majority of the Indian migrant labourers in South Africa

⁶⁰ M.S.S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2018.

⁶¹ Rettaimalai Sreenivasan, *Diwan Bahadur Rettaimalai Sreenivasan Avargal Than Varalaru*, Tamil Kudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009, p. 6.

belonged to the untouchable communities from south India. He returned to India in 1921, resumed his work among the depressed classes and for his tireless activism over the years, he was nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in the year 1923 by the colonial government. He was conferred the titles of Rao Sahib in the year 1926, Rao Bahadur in 1930 and Diwan Bahadur in the year 1936 by the government. He was one of the two representatives of the depressed classes in the Round Table Conferences along with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He passed away in the year 1945. Until his death, he served as a member of the Madras Legislative Council.

To trace the life and thoughts of Sreenivasan, we are fortunately left with a short autobiography written in 1939.⁶² Apart from this piece and his legislative assembly debates, there is not enough of his writings and speeches which have been preserved. It is unfortunate that despite his dedication for the cause of the Adi-Dravidas, none of his writings and speeches are available. The Paraiyan magazine of which he was the founder and editor has also not been preserved. With the limited resources available, this section of the chapter seeks to trace the ideas of Sreenivasan and his early efforts at the upliftment of the Adi-Dravidas.

Briefly narrating his family origins and youth he says that,⁶³

⁶² Rettaimalai Sreenivasan, Diwan Bahadur Rettaimalai Sreenivasan Avargal Than Varalaru, Tamil Kudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

“My ancestors were from Saambava community, and they said that during the period of East-India Company they migrated to Chennai city from Tanjore for trade.”

Continuing his story he adds that,⁶⁴

“I was in one of the villages in Chingleput in 1860. When I was studying in Coimbatore Arts college, out of total 400 students, excluding 10 students, everyone else were Brahmins. Caste formulations were very strictly followed. I did not become friends with any of the students, out of fear that they will get to know my caste, family, locality, etc, and they will treat me lowly; hence I would be reading sitting somewhere outside the school and enter class only after the school bell rang. When the classes end I would leave quickly before any students could reach me, would walk quickly and reach home. Thinking about the cruelty of my inability to play with other children, in deep sorrow I would think about how to overcome this disability. When I joined as an accountant in one of the East-India companies in the hill station of Nilgiris, the ten years I worked there, it was never dying worry as to how I am going to abolish untouchability.”

In 1890, Sreenivasan came to the city of Chennai. In the quest to uplift the Pariahs on par with other upper castes, he undertook a vigorous research. He travelled the length and breadth of the Tamil country, trying to trace the history from ancient temple sources and by decoding religious and other classical texts. He interacted with the Adi-Dravida communities who were considered as descendants of the

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 9.

original inhabitants, and were rendered untouchables by the Brahmins in the Tamil society. After his in-depth and extensive research, he returned back to Chennai. After his return, Sreenivasan felt the need to start a magazine for and of the Adi-Dravidas, which could become the voice of the voiceless. Regarding the background for his starting the Paraiyan magazine in 1893, he says,⁶⁵

“When the Government records were analyzed, it was seen that from the year 1772, that they were concerned about these communities. In the year 1818, the Revenue Board had asked the Collectors to find ways to uplift these communities. How this happened we do not know. From the year 1893 onwards they took interest in educating these communities. For 120 years these communities have remained without being concern of anyone. The 1893 Government Order which these communities considered as Magna Carta, it went immaterialized. After this only in 1893 I brought out the Paraiyan magazine as an instigating tool.”

The *Paraiyan* was first published in October, 1893. It started as a monthly magazine of mere four pages, at a cost of two anas per copy. The advertisement and other costsof first publication cost ten rupees and in two days four hundred copies of the magazine were sold in Chennai city. After three months the Paraiyan started to be published as weekly and after two years, the magazine purchased its own printing press.⁶⁶ The magazine carried articles about the social disabilities faced by the Adi-Dravidas, the caste atrocities practiced by the other castes on the Adi-

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁶ J. Balasubramaniam, *Sooriyodhayam Mudhal Udhayasoorian Varai: Dalit Ithazhgal 1869-1943*, Kalachuvadu Publications, Nagercoil, 2017, pp. 68-69.

Dravidas, asking for Government intervention on issues and good governance of the state. The Adi-Dravidas acknowledged the magazine and wherever they would assemble they actively debated the issues published in the magazine. The magazine seemed to have created awareness among the depressed classes and they found a voice of theirs through the magazine. It was one of the early instances when a community that had been oppressed for centuries found their opinions voiced in the public domain. Hence this initiative of Sreenivasan was welcomed with utmost seriousness and lot of fanfare.

On 7th October 1895, there was a huge gathering of the Adi-Dravidas at Victoria Hall in Chennai. They carried white flags and marched with bandwagons. This was the first time in history that the Adi-Dravidas held a meeting at the Victoria Hall.⁶⁷ This meeting was organized to talk about the greatness of the community and also to prove to the other caste Hindus that they are no less in the society. There were a lot of speakers from different parts of the state belonging to the Adi-Dravida community who spoke during the event. Of course, this event was met with resistance from the upper castes. Upper caste Hindus working in the Gram Munsifs, Collector office, Revenue Board, etc, tried to create mischief in order to derail the program. Caste Hindus in Congress, religious conversion groups, and even individuals belonging to the Adi-Dravida community stood opposed to the meeting. A magazine was also brought out in order to oppose the event. Several other magazines vehemently opposed this initiative. A person belonging to the same community tried to malign Sreenivasan by saying that he wanted to run away from

⁶⁷ Rettaimalai Sreenivasan, *Diwan Bahadur Rettaimalai Sreenivasan Avargal Than Varalaru*, Tamil Kudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009, p. 12.

the country, but that did not work out. In 1896, citing one of the letters to editor published in *Paraiyan* as being derogatory towards the community, some other members of the community dragged Sreenivasan to court. He was fined rupees 100 for publishing that letter. In support of him, hundreds of Adi-Dravidas marched to court with *Pariyan* written on their forehead and chests, with bundles of money. Sreenivasan did not know who paid the fine since it was the people belonging to the community who bailed him out jointly.⁶⁸ These events prove that Sreenivasan emerged as a leader of the Adi-Dravidas as early as 1890's. It can also be construed that the *Paraiyan* magazine played a crucial role in bringing about a political churning among the Adi-Dravidas. His work in the cause of the Adi-Dravidas carried on unabated till 1900 when he left for England with the aim of putting forward the disabilities and steps required for amelioration of their conditions to the Government of Britain. After his departure, *Paraiyan* stopped printing after seven years. Sreenivasan returned back to India in 1919.

Conclusion

This chapter initially looks into the early historiographical trends and how the discipline of intellectual history has shaped up in India. In order to study the intellectual history of the Adi-Dravida movement, it is necessary to understand the earlier writings on the Adi-Dravidas by various actors who took interest in the lives of the untouchables. Primarily, it was the colonial ethnographers, Christian missionaries and then the Adi-Dravidas themselves who attempted to explain the reasons for their degraded position in the Tamil society and undertook efforts at

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 13.

overcoming these disabilities. Unless these early scholarly and activist interventions are not understood, it would not be possible to understand the emergence and growth of the Adi-Dravida movement in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The early nineteenth-century writings on the Adi-Dravidas by colonial ethnographers and missionaries, were overwhelmingly influenced by the understanding that the Indian society was largely slaves to the brahmin dominated Hindu social order and caste was central to the functioning of the society. Though this understanding cannot be applied as a generalization about all the people who took interest in understanding the Indian society, this was the larger discourse which influenced researchers of that period. However, as researches on caste continued, they understood that this system is not as simplistic as it was thought to be. The researches of Caldwell on Dravidian taxonomy and British efforts at the decennial census which began in 1871, brought about a sea change in the understanding of the Tamil society. The Adi-Dravidas were not the early targets of the proselytization activities of the missions. However, after the great famine in Madras presidency which was followed by mass conversions to Christianity when the Adi-Dravidas voluntarily converted. The closer interaction with the untouchables brought about a change in the mentality of the missionaries. After this period of mass conversion, the efforts of the colonial government and missionaries at amelioration of the civil disabilities of the Adi-Dravidas was visible. A emphasis on the education of the depressed classes and ending the evil of untouchability emerged. Many governmental welfare measures were proposed, which faced backlash and hurdles, created by the upper-castes. Despite these inconveniences certain welfare measures did reach the Adi-Dravidas.

The emergence of the Dalit movement in TamilNadu can be traced to the last decades of the 19th century. There were three main historical factors, i.e., introduction of education by the colonial government, missionary activities and the large-scale migrations, which led to the emergence of the Dalit movement. These historical processes created an educated class among the Dalits, who aspired to live a life with self-respect and dignity and did not accept their denigrated status in the society, brought upon them by the so-called upper-castes. The historical subjugation of the Dalits was not merely economic or political, but primarily cultural. The early Dalit intellectuals who understood this, constructed counter narratives, which was strongly rooted in cultural struggles, primarily critiquing the brahmanical religious practices, scriptures, and rituals. This marked the beginning of the Dalit intellectual traditions in TamilNadu.

The early Dalit leaders and intellectuals did not shy away from using the modern apparatuses of the colonial state. Iyothee Thass, one of the early Dalit intellectuals began a movement among the Dalits tracing their ancestry to the period of King Ashoka and assigning a Buddhist creed to them. Thass opined that all Dalits were Buddhists and it was because of their creed that they had to face persecution in the hands of the Hindu brahmins and were relegated to the lowest strata in the society. He began the Sakhya Buddhist society as a movement among the Dalits, which got widespread acceptance and support within the community. He continuously petitioned to the British government highlighting the disabilities and discrimination in public spaces faced by Dalits at the hands of the upper castes. His primary focus was on education for the depressed classes and pleaded to the British for the removal of social disabilities. The thrust for the emergence of the Dalit

cultural and political consciousness was provided by the effective use of print media by Iyothee Thass and his followers.

Rettaimalai Sreenivasan started his activism in the city of Chennai in 1890. He formed the Paraiyan Mahajana Sabha and began a journal *Paraiyan*. Iyothee Thass was a religio-cultural critique of the Brahmanical Hindu order, whereas, Sreenivasan was more interested in the 'political'. He led delegations to the British government, petitioned, held public meetings and his magazine carried news about various civil disabilities faced by the Adi-Dravidas in different parts of the presidency. The magazine also was prompt at critiquing or posturing to the colonial government about any of the policies which were to be implemented in India and how it would affect the Adi-Dravidas. *Paraiyan* created a certain churning among the Adi-Dravidas, attempted at developing their political consciousness and for the first time, it gave the untouchables, the impression that their issues were also being heard. Iyothee Thass and Sreenivasan's efforts in the fag end of the nineteenth century amongst the depressed classes laid the foundation for the emergence of the Adi-Dravida political movement in the early twentieth century in TamilNadu.

Chapter II

MAKING OF THE ADI-DRAVIDA PUBLIC AND THE POLITICAL IN TAMILNADU

The beginning of the twentieth century was a period of immense political and intellectual tumult. The nationalistic sentiments were getting regimented under the aegis of the Indian National Congress, at the same time the brewing sentiments of non-brahminism were increasingly taking root in the Tamil country. The Adi-Dravidas were also not to be left behind as their political aspirations too were becoming more profound. This chapter will deal with the changing contours of these differing ideologies and movements, their intersectionality and the emergence of the Adi-Dravida political movement. Often group or community interests form the underbelly for the emergence of socio-political movements. This can be argued in the case of colonial Tamil Nadu as well and this aspect also is explained in this chapter.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the Congress' political shift from the moderate to the extremist phase. Lord Curzon in November 1900 made a statement that Congress was 'tottering to its fall', but this was a gross misunderstanding, as he did not gauge that the moderate Congress sentiments which was seen, was only that of the small section of the nationalists.¹ The methods of petitioning and appealing to the British and the English public, was seen as demeaning and unnecessary. The moderate leaders who came from English educated elite class and met for a three days conference once in a year,

¹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1983, p. 97.

were just part-time activists.² The growing sentiments of nationalism were not something which they could comprehend or address. The Partition of Bengal in 1905, proved to be the tipping point as it did not augur well with the Indian public because it was clearly understood as a policy of divide and rule. The Bengal partition and the series of events which followed marked the beginning of the extremist phase of the Congress. Sumit Sarkar says, “There was first what may be termed ‘constructive Swadeshi’- the rejection of futile and self-demeaning ‘medicant’ politics in favour of self-help Swadeshi industries, national schools, and attempts at village improvement and organization.”³

In history, the first attempt at a nationalist mode of agitation in the Tamil region was undertaken by the non-brahmin merchants of the city of Madras. The proselytization activities of the Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century and the support extended to such efforts by the government officials hurt their Hindu religious sensibilities. The Pachaiyappa’s College was founded in 1842 under the patronage of the merchant class, to counter the missionary educational institutions and in 1844 one Lakshminarasu Chetty founded the ‘Crescent’ newspaper, to protect “the rights and privileges of the Hindu community”.⁴ There was another grievance which directly affected their class interest; the unfair balance of trade in favour of the English East India Company after the renewal of the Company’s charter. The Tamil Nadu merchants wanted to pressurize the British parliament to remove the unfair aspects of the Charter, for

² *ibid.*, p. 98.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴ David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937*, South Asia Books, Columbia, 1977, pp. 13-14.

which they formed the Madras Native Association in 1852.⁵ However after the transfer of power to the Crown in 1858, the association gradually became defunct, as their primary grievance had been removed.

The initial promise exhibited by the merchants of providing a political leadership could not sustain. The Indian merchants were still a comprador bourgeoisie and were heavily dependent on the trade and business houses controlled by the Europeans. As they did not have an independent economic base, they were not confident of providing a serious and consistent leadership against the colonizers. Hence it were the professional middle class who led the nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu. In the Madras Presidency, an overwhelming majority of the professional middle class was constituted by people belonging to the brahmin community. Historically the brahmins were the landholding, as well as the literary class. They were beneficiaries of the English education and they entered into various government services, were economically well to do and hence wielded considerable domination in the social, political and economic sphere of TamilNadu.⁶ According to Nambi K. Arooran, “The exclusiveness of the Brahmins and their intimacy with the government, by virtue of their monopoly in education, prevented the other castes from seeking any improvement. The Brahmins, who by virtue of their caste occupied a dominant position in society, could hardly afford to advocate any fundamental social changes without at the same time undermining their unchallenged dominance.”⁷

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷ K. Nambi Arooran, *The Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905-1944*, Aarooran Pathippagam, Chennai, 2008, pp. 4-5.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the non-brahmin middle classes came to understand the importance of professional jobs, and thereby education as well. There was a small section among these non-brahmin communities who had benefitted out of colonial education. However these communities could not enter the already crowded job market and the nepotism of the brahmins did not allow other community members to enter or prosper in the different professions. This created huge resentment among the non-brahmin communities who came from landholding and merchant backgrounds.⁸ The following tables will show the dominance of brahmins in education and government jobs:

Table 1

Distribution of Selected Government Jobs in 1912

	No.	Percent of Total Male Population	Percent of Appointments
<i>Deputy Collectors</i>			
Brahmans	77	3.2	55
Non-Brahman Hindus	30	85.6	21.5
Muslims	15	6.6	5
Indian Christians	7	2.7	8
Europeans and Eurasians	11	0.1	
<i>Sub-Judges</i>			
Brahmans	15		.3
Non-Brahman Hindus	3		16.783
Muslims	Nil		

⁸ David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937*, South Asia Books, Columbia, 1977, p. 18.

Indian Christians	Nil		
Europeans and Eurasians	Nil		
<i>District Munsifs</i>			
Brahmans	93		72.6
Non-Brahman Hindus	25		19.5
Muslims	2		1.6
Indian Christians	5		3.9
Europeans and Eurasians	3		2.4

Source: Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XXI (*Reports from Commissioners, etc., Vol. XI*), “Royal Commission on the Public Services,” Appendix Vol. II, Minutes of Evidence relating to the Indian and Provincial Services taken in Madras from 8th to the 17th of January, 1913,” Cd, 7293, 1914, pp. 103-104.

Table 2
Distribution of Selected Government Jobs in 1917

Revenue and Judicial Departments	Brahman	Non-Brahman	Indian Christian	Muslim	Percent of Non-Brahman, Christian and Muslim Appointments
Tahsildars, including Huzur Sharistadars	135	69	14	12	41.3
Deputy Tahsildars	214	65	21	10	30.9
English Head Clerks	16	5	2	1	33.3
Sharistadars of District	13	6	1	2	40.9

Courts					
Sharistadars of Sub-Courts	15	4	1	Nil	25
Total average of non-Brahmans, Indian Christian, and Muslims in Revenue and Judicial departments					33.3

Table 3

Male Literacy of Selected Castes, 1901-1921
(figures in per cent)

	1901	1911	1921
Tamil Brahman	73.6	71.9	71.5
Telugu Brahman	67.3	68.2	59.7
Nair	39.5	41.9	42.9
Chetti	32.0	39.1	39.5
Indian Christian	16.2	20.4	21.9
Nadar	15.4	18.1	20.0
Baliya Naidu, Kavarai	14.3	20.9	22.3
Vellala	6.9	24.6	24.2
Kamma	4.8	12.2	13.6
Kapu, Reddi	3.8	9.0	10.2
Velama	2.5	3.6	7.0

Source: India, Census Commissioner, *Census of India: Madras, 1921*, XIII, Pt. 1, 128-129.

Table 4

Male Literacy in English of Selected Caste, 1901-1921

(figures in per cent)

	1901	1911	1921
Tamil Brahman	17.88	22.27	28.21
Telugu Brahman	10.84	14.75	17.37
Indian Christian	2.72	4.41	5.47
Nair	1.54	2.97	4.57
Baliya Naidu, Kavarai	0.98	2.60	3.43
Vellala	0.19	2.12	2.37
Chetti	0.15	0.98	2.34
Velama	0.06	0.41	0.63
Nadar	0.05	0.30	0.75
Kapu, Reddi	0.04	0.22	0.41
Kamma	0.03	0.20	0.45

Source: India, Census Commissioner, *Census of India: Madras, 1921, XIII, Pt.1,*

Table 5

Graduates of Madras University, 1870-1918

Year	Brahmans 1,315,600*		Non-Brahman Hindus 36,521,000*		Indian Christians 1,167,600*		Muslims 2,824		Europeans and Eurasians 41,000*		Total Number of Graduates
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1870 - 1871	110	67	36	22	10	6	Nil		8	5	164
1880 - 1881	492	64	171	22	47	6	2	0.2 5	58	7.5	770
1890 - 1991	1,461	67	445	20.5	168	8	20	1	75	3.5	2,169
1901 - 1911	4,074	71	1,035	18	306	5.3	69	1	225	4	5,709
1918 +	10,26 9	67	3,213	21	1,343	8.8	186	1.2	205	1	15,216

Source: MRO, Public, Ordinary Series, G.O. 22, Jan. 21, 1919.

Tamil Buddhist Movement in the 20th Century

In the intense political climate of early twentieth century Tamil Nadu, when the sentiments of anti-colonialism and non-brahminism as a counter-narrative to nationalism were brewing, the Adi-Dravidas too sought to carve out a politico-cultural space for themselves distinct from the above two dominant ideologies. It was Tamil Buddhism which provided them the initial hope. The Tamil Buddhists created a distinct socio-cultural history of the Adi-Dravidas, the underbelly of which lies in religion and anti-brahminism. However, the anti-brahmin critique of

the Adi-Dravidas was cultural and social, whereas, the critique of the caste Hindus was predominantly political and economic. The ideological underpinnings of these lower-caste movements will become clearer as this thesis progresses.

The question of religion was crucial for the upheaval of the depressed classes. Conversion was seen as an emancipatory process from the clutches of the caste-ridden Hindu society. The untouchables had found empowerment at different points in history, by converting to different religions in which they saw the emancipatory potential. Buddhism was one such religion, ever since its foundation, had an overwhelming impact on the outcastes. The Adi-Dravidas too, under the able leadership of Iyothee Thass, saw the egalitarian principles of Buddhism as a liberation ideology.

Iyothee Thass in 1907, began a weekly journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan*, with an average circulation of 500 copies.⁹ The beginning of the journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan* was significant in regards to the early intellectual activism among the Adi-Dravidas. *Oru Paisa Tamilan* was a Buddhist weekly; it played a crucial role in linking all the branches of the Sakhya Buddhist Society. They carried regular news about the latest developments in the Buddhist world and also brought out regular instructions on the preaching's and practices of Tamil Buddhism. There were regular interpretations of the history of the subcontinent and Tamil Nadu in particular, from a Buddhist viewpoint. The paper also had commentaries on the everyday socio-political issues of the Tamils, detailed weather reports, prices of commodities, latest scientific inventions, on matters relating to state and governance as it directly affected the life of the downtrodden, international

⁹Nalini Rajan, *21st Century Journalism in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2007.

developments, etc. The journal was clearly an attempt at creating an alternate subaltern discourse countering all forms of Brahmanism which had gained prominence under the British rule.¹⁰ It was the most productive phase in Iyothee Thass's life, in which he produced voluminous literature based on his own original research into Tamil culture, history and religion. The movement and his ideas spread far and wide and it made the Tamil society think critically on issues confronting the society. Iyothee Thass passed away in the year 1914 and his death created certain glitches in the advance of the Buddhist movement. It was rendered confined to certain regions like the Kolar Gold Fields, parts of north Arcot district and Madras city.

During his active days, Iyothee Thass provided a strong central leadership uniting the different branches. The *Tamilan* magazine for the first time in 1914 and again in 1926, for brief periods, stopped printing due to different organizational and financial issues. Despite these glitches it was resumed and continued to print till 1936, when it finally stopped. This marks the end of the epoch of Tamil Buddhism as imagined by Iyothee Thass. Later on, the activists of the movement went on to become recruits of the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement.¹¹ Nevertheless Iyothee Thass and the Buddhist movement were successful in imbibing the values of dignity and self-respect among the Adi-Dravidas, by recreating a history of the community of a valorous past. Tamil Buddhists carved out a distinct space for the Adi-Dravidas in the public sphere of

¹⁰ G. Aloysius, *Dalit –Subaltern Emergence in Religio-Cultural Subjectivity: Iyothee Thassar and Emancipatory Buddhism*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2007, p.22.

¹¹ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 225.

Tamil Nadu, which provided the base for the later Adi-Dravida leaders to build a political movement.

The post-Iythee Thass Tamil Buddhism

Iyothee Thass left behind copious literature based on original research and interpretation of the Tamil past, classical literature and religion. These texts of Iyothee Thass formed the basis for the future movement. At the time of his demise there was also a dedicated second rung leadership, who were well trained ideologically as well as in organization building., Hence, the loss of Iyothee Thass did create certain hurdles, but did not stop the spread of the movement to newer areas. The period preceding his death was also a politically tumultuous period in the subcontinent. The British government was contemplating gradual devolution of power and different groups and communities were actively involved in the clamor for power as none wanted to be left out in the race for power.¹² The Buddhist movement too was inevitably affected by these political changes and it was in this backdrop that they had to continue their activities.

Iyothee Thass had handed over the responsibility of running the *Tamilan*, to his eldest son C.I. Pattabiram.¹³ Pattabiram had already committed himself for several years to the cause of Tamil Buddhism. His activities were concentrated in the city of Madras and he had to shift to the headquarters in Royapettah to manage the general administration and to oversee the publication of *Tamilan*. He had good grasp over English language and was well-knowledgeed about the oriental scholar's

¹² David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937*, South Asia Books, Columbia, 1977, p. 19.

¹³ *Tamilan*, Issue No. 48, p. 7, 1914.

writings on Buddhism. Despite all these credits, he could not handle the pressure and the movement which mainly came to be symbolized with its journal *Tamilan*, stopped publishing in 1917.¹⁴ It was revived again in 1921, by the Sakhya Buddhist group at Kolar, with G. Appaduraiyar as the editor and V.P.S. Moniyar as the printer and publisher. Moniyar hailed from Madras and he was a part of the Youth Association because of which the printing press was set up in Madras. It became increasingly difficult to bring out as a weekly because of the distance between Kolar and Madras and mobilizing funds became difficult. In August the same year, *Tamilan* became a fortnightly and the following year it again stopped printing.¹⁵

The head branch in Royapettah, Madras, found the functioning difficult as there were no able persons to lead the movement. Because of this different aspects of the organizational activities suffered along with the printing of *Tamilan*.. It was during this period Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu took up the organizational responsibilities of the Sakhya Buddhist Society. He did some exemplary work in spreading the ideas of Tamil Buddhism as a missionary and as a crusader against caste. Narasu strongly believed that “...impossibility of creating a new people, united and cultured, without the abolition of caste and the uprootal of all religion whose life blood is caste.”¹⁶ For him the ideal religion was Buddhism, which provided solution to the problems. He filled the void which was created because of the absence of senior leadership in Madras and worked with high level of energy

¹⁴ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 99.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.100.

¹⁶ P.L. Narasu, Foreword to his book *A Study of Caste*, K.V. Raghavulu Printers, Madras, 1922.

and enthusiasm which could match the youth association activists. Narasu emerged as the next tallest leader of the movement after Iyothee Thass, filling the gap in leadership. He travelled to different parts of North Arcot, Kolar and other places inaugurating conferences and involving in organization building activities. Narasu in 1922 published *The Study of Caste*, which was one of the important texts produced during the period.¹⁷

One of the other areas which witnessed the spread of Tamil Buddhism is Kolar Gold Fields (KGF). G. Appaduraiyar and A.P. Periasami Pulavar were the main architects of the movement in this area and a new branch was founded in 1915 at the Champion Reef at KGF. There was overwhelming response for the occasional discourses conducted by M. Raghavar and Appaduraiyar in KGF before 1915 among the mining workers. The Marikuppam branch was not adequate to meet the needs of the association. Land and building for the purpose was provided by mining authorities due to petitioning by certain prominent members of the society. At Champion Reef, regular classes were conducted for preachers and new members and later a reading room was also opened for the general public.¹⁸ Through these intellectual activities, not only did the liberative message of the Buddhist movement reach the masses, but also it created interest among many and convinced many to become Buddhists.

In 1914, A. P. Periasami Pulavar shifted his residence to Tiruppathur, in order to build the movement in Tiruppathur and other parts of the North Arcot

¹⁷ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 101.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 102.

district. He mobilized funds, constructed a new building which was inaugurated on the Wesak day in 1915. All this was done with meticulous care so that no financial or other problems were created. A new committee was formed with himself as the President and K.C. Krishnasamy as Secretary.¹⁹ By 1921, the Tirupatthur branch had membership in hundreds. Under the able leadership of Periasami Pulavar, the branch became a centre of multifarious activities and was able to attract large number of people of rural North Arcot. Periasami Pulavar travelled to all villages preaching the emancipatory message of Tamil Buddhism, in forms of small group meetings as well as mass public meetings. Not only the Adi-Dravidas, but also people belonging to other caste and creed, attended these meetings. The main content of the meetings was about the collective self-recognition of themselves as “casteless Dravidians/Tamilians”, recovery and rediscovery of the ancient Tamil past and to articulate and assert these ideas in the sacred and secular sphere of public life.²⁰ People belonging to different places in rural North Arcot district, responded differently to the message that was being propagated. Some were content with the religious message of the movement, made efforts to build temples and organize Buddhist societies, whereas others saw it as a movement which had the potential of social emancipation.²¹ There were also demands such as reallocation of grazing land for the landless, which mainly included people of the lower caste.²² On the whole, it can be stated that under the leadership of Periasami Pulavar and his group, the Tamil Buddhism in North Arcot, magnified hope and

¹⁹ *Tamilan*, Issue No. 37, p. 8, 1915.

²⁰ *ibid.*, Issue No. 1, pp. 5, 8, 9, 10, 1921.

²¹ *ibid.*, Issue No. 9, p. 5, 1915.

²² *ibid.*, Issue No. 1, pp. 5, 8, 1921.

the aspiration for a change became more visible among the stakeholders of the region. In the same way, branches were started at the military area of Ulsoor Rock in Bangalore in 1915. This branch initially included workers who were Sappers and Miners. In Chengalpet and Secunderabad also branches were introduced and these branches were very active. Under the leadership of V.T. Venkatasamy and M.M. Muthu, the Secunderabad branch, on their own, released few articles of Iyothee Thass which were earlier published in Tamil. The Secunderabad branch was formally framed with C.D. Paul as President and M. Ponrangam as Secretary in 1916. The Nagpur branch, even though functional, was mostly isolated in its functioning. It began the system of membership registration through post. Overseas branches at Rangoon and Natal were also functional; however there is not much information about these branches.

The founding of the Siddhartha Publishing House in KGF by B.M. Rajarathinam was one of the important developments that happened during this period which gave impetus to the growth of the Buddhist movement. After the death of Iyothee Thass, the *Tamilan's* publishing stopped when the Siddhartha Publishing House was formally launched by Rajarathinam in 1918. Iyothee Thass's mission to publish books was unfulfilled because of the excess workload he had of *Tamilan* and other organizational activities. Publishing was taken up by Rajarathinam as his life's mission.²³ His motive was to bring into public domain the past published writings of Iyothee Thass and other original texts. In order to do this, he started collecting orders in bulk from 1918 from far off branches in Natal,

²³ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 106-107.

Rangoon and also local branches like Bangalore, etc. By 1922, thousands of copies of *Condemnation of Caste*, *God Murugan*, *The Origin of Castes*, *Amman's History*, *History of Thiruvalluavar*, *False and Real Brahmins*, *Buddhist Festivals* along with other books were printed and distributed. Rajarathinam got all of these printed in the different presses of Kolar. As the demand for these pamphlets and booklets increased manifold, it became unmanageable for Rajarathinam. Hence the Madras MYM Press was shifted to Kolar, in favor of Rajarathinam, and renamed as Siddhartha Printing House.²⁴ The work done by Rajarathinam and Siddhartha Publishing House played an immense role in the spread of the ideas and tenets of Tamil Buddhism. This, in turn, helped the formation of new branches and growth of the movement.

There were two General Conferences of the Buddhists, first one held at Moore Pavilion – People's Park in Madras (1917) and second at Mayo Hall, Bangalore (1920). The primary concern of the delegates was socio-political aspects of peoples' life and they collectively addressed this to the state.²⁵ The first conference was of the belief that if different communities were not working for each other's good, India was not yet ready for Home Rule. There is a need to form the preparatory ground for the same. One other demand was that free and compulsory education must be provided to all Indians. The first conference resolved that if the British decide to grant representation on the basis of community, then the depressed classes too have to be given their due share and

²⁴*The Birth Celebrations of Siddhartha*(Tamil), Published on the Occasion of the Fourth Anniversary of Siddhartha Publications.

²⁵ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 108.

that enquiry about the caste of individuals in public institutions, free and compulsory universal education must be ended.²⁶ In addition to the demands of the first conference, the second conference demanded the continuance of separate column for Buddhists in the upcoming census, special provisions for children of poor Buddhists and the Wesak day to be declared as a national holiday.

In 1926, the *Tamilan*, which stopped printing in 1922, was revived in KGF. The shifting of the MYM press to KGF from Madras in favour of Rajarathinam helped greatly in reviving the *Tamilan*. The *Tamilan* resumed printing with G. Appaduraiyar as editor and B.M. Rajarathinam as printer and publisher. In July 1932, the seventh year after its resumption, *Tamilan* stopped coming out for a brief period due to a Government Order which said that a particular article in the *Tamilan* had hurt the sentiments of some Muslims.²⁷ In November of the same year, the *Tamilan* resumed printing; however it did not carry the signature of Appaduraiyar as editor. Appaduraiyar gradually withdrew himself from the responsibilities of the journal due to his increasing health concerns and the burden of organizational responsibilities. At this time, Iyakannu Pulavar stepped in and took up responsibility of the editor with the help of M.V. Ponniah. In 1935, *Tamilan* decreased to half its circulation and within the same year it finally met its death²⁸.

The *Tamilan*'s shift to Kolar from Madras was conceived less as change and more as continuity. Under Appaduraiyar's editorship, Iyothee Thass message

²⁶ *Madras Mail*, 5th November, 1917.

²⁷ *Tamilan*, Issue No. 7, p. 3, 1932.

²⁸ G. Aloysius, *Iyothee Thassar and Tamil Buddhist Movement*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2015, p. 110.

was very successfully carried forward by the *Tamilan*. However due to the political developments that took place over the period of time, the style and substance of the Kolar *Tamilan* varied from that of Iyothee Thass. Whereas the Kolar *Tamilan* was a loose re-construction of the popular contemporary politics, the previous Madras *Tamilan* had been an intellectual reconstruction of the religio-historical past of the Tamil Buddhists. Some of the new crop of people who contributed to the *Tamilan*, among others, included M. Ponnu, M. David Pillai, Annapoorni Ammal, M.V. Ponniah, Rathinasabapathy. These were social activists who were more committed towards the liberation of the depressed classes from caste based disabilities through political means. As such, they were not much interested in Tamil history and literature and in the process of re-construction of the Tamil past. A further reason for religious Buddhism finding less space was the *Tamilan*'s attempt to bring in a larger area of Tamil Nadu into its reporting and distribution. As Aloysius would say, "The message of Buddhism as interpreted through the columns of 'Kolar Tamilan' was considerably more 'secularized' and 'modernized' to suit the needs of the times. From 'Madras' to 'Kolar' was then a continuity as well as 'break' ...".²⁹

By the 1930s, there were interesting developments on the organizational front. The main branches of Sakhya Buddhists, Madras, Bangalore, KGF and Tirupatthur, saw their functions diversified. While the normal religious functions and religious discourses continued as usual, the emancipatory aspirations of the Adi-Dravidas, which were always ingrained in Tamil Buddhist ideology, began to be articulated under different secular banners such as the Adi-Dravida

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 111.

Association, Dravida Sabha, etc. Many of the main leaders of the movement such as P.L. Narasu, G. Appaduraiyar, A.P. Periasami Pulavar, T.S. Murugesar, V.P.S. Moniyar, Iyyakannu Pulavar, M. Ponnu, M. Iyyavu, C. Manickam among others, managed their time between the various diversified organizational activities. With the passing of time, their sphere of activity too began to diverge with regard to the contemporary demands. The social-political and the religio-political began to be debated on distinct or separate platforms. As has been noted before, due to the emergence of a younger group of activists who contributed actively to the *Tamilan* and whose interests lay more in the socio-political as opposed to the religious aspects, the Tamil Buddhist movement went into a downward spiral. In due course, the core propagation of Tamil Buddhism as the religion of the oppressed lost traction.

M C Rajah - a brief bio-sketch

Rajah, born in 1883 into a family of Pariahs, an untouchable community of Tamil Nadu, was fortunate enough to have access to education. His father was an employee of the government press and his grandfather was a veteran of the Indian mutiny.³⁰ Rajah opined that his education from a Christian Missionary School and the Madras Christian College helped him in learning the spirit of tolerance.³¹ Rajah began his career in 1905 as a teacher-trainer at the Teacher Training

³⁰V. Alex, *Perunthalaivar M.C. Rajah Singhanaikal*, Ezhuthu, Madurai, 2009, p. 8.

³¹Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 164.

College, Saidapet and secured a degree in teaching from the same college.³² Later he was employed as a lecturer in Voorhees College, Vellore.³³

Rajah belonging to a Pariah family could identify with the afflictions of the outcastes from his own experiences. He could comprehend how for ages a vast section of Indian society was excluded and denied of social justice and equal rights in the name of caste system. He realized that education could be an emancipatory force, and hence appealed to the government to provide better scholastic opportunities to children from untouchable communities. Rajah's efforts for the education of the depressed classes impressed the colonial government and he was nominated to various committees of government education department. His activities helped in securing scholarships, building hostels for the Adi-Dravidas and also in beginning a Dravidian school at Nungambakkam in 1936³⁴.

In 1917, Rajah led a deputation of the depressed classes from the Madras Presidency to Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. He led another deputation to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Chelmsford, in 1919 and was appointed as the honorary Presidency Magistrate in the same year³⁵. In 1924, he was invited to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Public Services and headed a deputation of depressed classes to Lord Goschen, Governor of Madras, in 1925. In 1926, Rajah presided over the All India Depressed Classes Leaders'

³²H. Bhama, *M.C. Rajah- A Study*, An unpublished MPhil dissertation submitted at the Department of History, University of Madras, 1983, p. 4.

³³V. Alex, *Perunthalaivar M.C. Rajah Singhanaikal*, Ezhuthu, Madurai, 2009, p. 9.

³⁴SwarajBasu(ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 13.

³⁵H. Bhama, *M.C. Rajah - A Study*, An unpublished MPhil dissertation submitted at the Department of History, University of Madras, 1983, p. 7.

Conference held in the Central Provinces and in the same year he was elected President of the All India Depressed Classes Association. Rajah was appointed as member of the Indian Central Committee which visited England in 1928, in relation to the new political reforms³⁶. Rajah served as a member of the provincial and the central legislative bodies' from 1919–1939, for a period of twenty years. He was honored with the title of Rao Bahadur by the collector of Madras on 15th December 1922, for his tireless efforts in the struggle for reclaiming the lost dignity and rights of the untouchable communities.³⁷

Rajah's nomination to the Madras legislative council had to face many hurdles. In the year 1919, he was nominated to the provincial legislative body. His nomination came under criticism and sparked protests from the Home Rule Leaguers. Rajah was labelled as an "avowed Brahmin hater".³⁸ The government was criticized for this nomination and the name of V G Vasudeva Pillay, a Congressman, was proposed as a representative of the depressed classes in the Madras legislature.³⁹ Though Rajah was nominated as a legislature, the role of the Congress leaders was found to be questionable in this regard.

Non-Brahmin Justice Party and the Adi-Dravidas

In 1910's, apart from his work for making education accessible to the depressed classes, Rajah revived the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in the year 1916. He was

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁷ V. Alex, *Perunthalaivar M.C. Rajah Singhanaikal*, Ezhuthu, 2009, p. 17.

³⁸ Raj Sekhar Basu, *The Making of Adi Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu*, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, p. 22.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 22.

made the Honorary Secretary of the organization as well.⁴⁰ This was the same year in which the brewing sentiments of non-brahminism in the Madras presidency manifested itself for the first time into a political formation called the ‘South Indian Liberal Federation’ later renamed as ‘Justice Party’.⁴¹ Initially, earnest efforts were made on behalf of the Justicites, to incorporate the untouchable communities into the non-brahmin bloc. The political efforts of the Adi-Dravidas, their meetings, conferences and protests, were regularly reported in the journals ‘Justice’ and ‘Dravidan’.⁴² The positive attitude of the non-brahmin leaders towards issues of the untouchables impressed the Adi-Dravida leaders like Rajah and R. Veeraiyan⁴³ during the initial years, as they were the prominent organizers of the movement.

But soon fissures emerged between the caste-Hindu dominated Justice Party and the leaders of the depressed classes. The Justice Party won in the first elections in Madras presidency in the year 1920. The partial lack of political will on the part of the non-brahmin leaders impeded the aims and objectives of the

⁴⁰ V. Alex, *Perunthalaivar M.C. Rajah Singhanaikal*, Ezhuthu, Madurai, 2009, p. 13.

⁴¹ J.B.P. More, *Rise and Fall of the Dravidian Justice Party*, IRIS publications, Kerala, 2009.

⁴² ‘Justice’ and ‘Dravidan’ were the mouthpieces of the Justice Party. Justice began in the year 1916 was in English and Dravidan started in the year 1917 was published in Tamil. Protest gatherings, conduct of conferences and resolutions passed in the meetings of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in different parts of TamilNadu were regularly reported in these journals. The Adi-Dravida movement in its initial days did not have journals or magazines of its own. It were the Justicites, in order to incorporate the Adi-Dravidas into the non-brahmin bloc, provided them the platform. Justice magazine is not available, but Dravidan, though not completely, has been preserved in the Periyar Thidal Library and Documentation Centre in Chennai.

⁴³ R. Veeraiyan was an Adi-Dravida leader, who hailed from Coimbatore district in TamilNadu. He was a prominent leader in the western region of TamilNadu, worked effortlessly regarding the issues of the community. For his services towards his community he was nominated to the Madras legislative assembly by the British in the year 1924. He started a magazine *AdiDravida Pathukavalan (AdiDravida Guardian)* in 1927, it was bilingual. Neither this journal, nor his writings or speeches (except his speeches in the legislative assembly) are available.

Ministry. The consensualists did not favour implementation of radical measures. The 'depressed classes' formed a significant part of the populace in the Madras presidency. Neither the representatives of the 'untouchables' in the local bodies nor the policies of the Ministry pertaining to elementary education and development of public facilities could satisfy the expectations of the depressed classes. The elite non-brahmin leadership of the Justice Party failed to comprehend their demands and this resulted in failure in building up non-brahmin solidarity.⁴⁴

Caste and Labour

The final detrimental matter was the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills (B&C Mills) strike in 1921.⁴⁵ In order to understand the riots which preceded the strike, it is important to understand the social composition of the mill's workforce. In 1918, the Hindus formed roughly about two-thirds of the workforce. The Adi-Dravidas were twenty percent and the third main community was Indian Christians⁴⁶ who were one-twelfth of the workforce and fourth was the Urdu speaking Muslims⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Raj Sekhar Basu, *The Making of Adi Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu*, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, p. 19.

⁴⁵ The Buckingham and Carnatic Mill strike was one of the earliest organized protest movements witnessed in Madras Presidency. The strike was declared on 20th June and continued for a period of six months. The strike was supported by the Nationalists as well as the Justice Party. There was widespread discontent among the workers over the low wages and poor working conditions, which led to the B&C Mill trade union giving the strike call. In the course of the struggle the repression of the police on the workers was immense. At the same time the workers were divided on caste lines, the Adi-Dravida who stood with the unions call initially, but after a layoff of six months, with no other source of income, families in dire poverty, Adi-Dravidas could not support the strike call, which led to brutal communal clashes in Madras city, between the caste-Hindus/Muslims and Adi-Dravidas.

⁴⁶ The Indian Christians were mainly converts from untouchable communities and their socio-economic conditions were not much different from that of the Adi-Dravidas. They lived in Adi-Dravida slums and despite conversion to Christianity, the stigma of untouchability continued in their lives.

⁴⁷ They were descendants of the various artisanal groups who accompanied the Muslim conquerors of South India. Unlike the prosperous Tamil speaking Muslims, Urdu-speaking Muslims lived separately in *cheris*, or in a separate part of the Adi-Dravida *cheris*. They were

who constituted one-twentieth of the workforce.⁴⁸ Due to this diversity in the workforce, there existed communal differences among these communities, and these proved to be a hurdle for union leaders at many instances in uniting them on common workers issues.⁴⁹

1920's witnessed a series of strikes by workers of the B&C Mill over issues of wages, working hours, and primarily for recognition of the union. At the background of these protests, in October 1920, the promotion of one Natesa Mudaliar, an assistant jobber and suspension of the workers who protested this, proved to be the immediate cause for the strike call. The union leaders supported the strike call and a lockout committee was formed.⁵⁰ The mill owners perused on a regular basis their pre-war strategy of employing strike-breakers. In this context, the Adi-Dravidas who lived in extreme poverty in the cheris,⁵¹ were ferried in lorries with police protection, which often led to violent attacks on the lorries by the workers. This also widened the communal divide between the workers.⁵² A series of deliberations between the mill managers and the union leaders did not fructify. On 3rd June 1921, the B&C Mill workers gave a strike call in support of the Carnatic Mill workers, who had earlier supported the struggle of the

primarily urban dwellers, who had long lost their rural ties and worked in low-income professions like making beedis, slaughtering, tanneries, etc. They were suspicious of the trade union leaders who were mainly caste Hindus.

⁴⁸ Eamon Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 42-45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

⁵¹ Cherais were slums in Madras city where people from lower class and lower caste backgrounds mainly stay. The people from the cherais constitute the major workforce of the city.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Buckingham mill workers.⁵³ In response to this the Adi-Dravida workers dwelling in Puliyanthope, sent a letter to the union, conveying their inability to no longer participate in the strikes. After their decision, 700-800 Adi-Dravida workers marched together to work.⁵⁴

The non-cooperation of the Adi-Dravida workers with the strike call created lot of resentment among the non-Dalit workers of the factory. This eventually took a bloody turn as it led to clashes not only between the workers and police, but between the workers belonging to different communities as well. People belonging to the untouchable communities were targeted across the Madras city and attacks were carried out on them.⁵⁵ Rajah, while defending the decision of the Adi-Dravida workers in the Madras Legislative Council said, "...the Adi-Dravida labourers there told me expressly that during the previous strike, the one towards the end of last year, it was a strike continuing for about three or four months, during that strike the men of my community suffered considerably, and they had to part with the little jewels they had and even with their clothes."⁵⁶ The Hindu labourers maintained their rural ties, they possessed agricultural land. During holidays or lockouts they used to return to their homes to work. This provided economic relief to the caste Hindu workers, during periods of long layoffs. Whereas the Adi-Dravidas did not have any such economic backing..

⁵³ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p. 247.

⁵⁴ Eamon Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1981, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Raj Sekhar Basu, The Making of Adi Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁶ Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 160.

They were completely dependent on the income from the factories and as they are not landholding communities, their connection with the rural also had long faded.⁵⁷ Hence their urge to get back to work was also justified by their leaders. Rajah further continued that “...what happened was that these labourers surrendered actually to the mill authorities and my men on 19 June expressed that they could not submit to any more strikes like that.”⁵⁸

The series of attacks on the Adi-Dravida cheris continued despite appeal from union leaders for calm. The Muslims who supported Khilafat movement, also supported the Hindus in their struggle.⁵⁹ Eventually on 21st October 1921, the workers had to surrender unconditionally, as it had become difficult to continue the struggle for a longer period. There were serious disagreements between the union leaders, which also played a crucial role in failure of the struggle. After the surrender by the union, the leaders were criticized vehemently by the workers.⁶⁰ Though many reasons, the B&C Mill strike was the first and brutal manifestation of communal disharmony between labourers belonging to the same workforce.

Issue of Nomenclature and the Politics of Assertion

In this backdrop of a growing discord with the non-brahmin movement, the Adi-Dravidas felt the need to create a separate identity, a distinct community name without any historical social stigma attached to it. The 1920's witnessed an

⁵⁷ Eamon Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1981, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Eamon Murphy, *Unions in Conflict: A Comparative Study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1981, p. 78.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 80.

increased intervention of the Adi-Dravidas in the intellectual and political sphere. A number of public meetings were conducted by the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in different parts of the state to urge the government to remove the names 'Pariah' and 'Panchama', which were considered to be demeaning the community and replace it with the term 'Adi-Dravida'. These conferences also appealed to the untouchables to accept the change in nomenclature.⁶¹ The Adi-Dravidas also made utmost use of the proliferation of print technology. During this period a number of magazines and pamphlets were published which justified and argued for the change in nomenclature.

On 19th July 1920, Mr. P.V. Subramaniam Pillai,⁶² delivered a speech in which he said that upper-caste names imply superiority and command respect; for example, the title brahmin implies a person who is in intimate relationship with Brahma.⁶³ In a caste based society like ours, a person's caste name conveys ideas of superiority and inferiority and on the other hand makes the lower castes feel degraded in their own esteem and also in the estimation of others. He added that the name given to the untouchables has to do a great deal with their position in the society and the esteem in which they are held. He argues that the term 'Pariah' whatever maybe its derivation, all that it means is mean and despicable, opposite of holy and respectable and that is why brahmins and caste-Hindus consider even

⁶¹ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p. 257.

⁶² Mr. P. Venkatachalam Subramaniam Pillai was the Life President of Madras Authee Dravida Jana Sabha and member of Chingleput District Board, Saidapet Taluk Board, and Madras District Educational Council. Proprietor of the P. Venkatachellam Condiment and Ice Factories and Proprietor of P. Venkatachellam Free Schools. This speech was delivered in Spur Tank in Madras city.

⁶³ "Authee Dravida" or "Dravida"?, The Madras Authee Dravida Jana Sabha Bulletin, No. 1, 1920, p. 1.

touching a Pariah as a sin.⁶⁴ He thanks the English people and the spread of English education, which awakened the sense of self-respect of the Pariahs, it made them realize their degraded status in the society and that is why they are protesting against the old opprobrious name and want to give themselves a better name.⁶⁵

He spoke further saying that, even caste Hindus want to designate a name devoid of caste connotations and it is only the brahmins who are happy with the caste system, because it gives them the highest position and therefore valorize their names.⁶⁶ According to Pillai, the non-brahmin Hindus disliked the title ‘Shudra’ and took upon themselves the title ‘Dravidian’, which means original inhabitants of southern India, but a name coined by the Sanskrit speaking Aryans. He exalted that, the non-brahmin Hindus were original inhabitants like the Adi-Dravidas, but they have submitted to the brahmin yoke of caste and foolishly glory in the place brahmins have given them, whereas we the original inhabitants have kept ourselves untainted from the Aryan influence. To quote Pillai:

“While Pariah and Panchama carry a caste stigma, Dravida denotes the descendants of those who have bowed their heads to Brahmins, why should we, the sons of those who defied the Aryan invaders take on a name which the slaves of the Aryans were given by their masters? Let us on the other hand by calling ourselves Adi-Dravidas emphasise our venerable antiquity

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 2.

and inherent right to the land we live in and have a name which will distinguish us from oppressor and their slaves.”⁶⁷

In 1920, Gopal Chettiar⁶⁸ published a booklet titled “*Adi Dravidargalin Poorviga Sarithiram*” (Ancient History of the Adi Dravidas). Though a small booklet, it was a well-researched work. He first discusses about various theories on the origins of Dravidian race as propounded by various scholars during the colonial period. Chettiar says that among the Dravidians the aborigines are believed to have black racial characteristics. After them came the *Nagas*. He believes a group within the Nagas, called *Eniar*, who were also called ‘Paraiyar’, are the Adi-Dravidas.⁶⁹ He argues that the Dandakaranya forests were first cleared for agriculture and building forts by the Eniars. Since they cut trees they got the name *Vettiyan*. Similarly, the people who dug wells for irrigation were called *Thotti*, musicians were called *Paanan*, teachers were called *Valluvans*, physical trainers were called *Panikkars*, cobblers were called *Semmaan*, Barber were *Ambattan*, washermen were *Vannaan*. Eniars were also kings during 2nd – 3rd century AD and ruled places like Ambur and Vellore.⁷⁰ The above mentioned categories are the sub-castes within the Pariahs even at present times. Chettiar argues that, it were these Pariahs who first created villages and they were the officials of these villages. In order to prove his arguments, he says, even now

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Gopal Chettiar was a social reformer and also the editor of the English magazine *New Reformer*. Though not an Adi-Dravida he took keen interest in their issues and worked for the uplift of the society. This booklet was published precisely to prove that it were the brahmins who were responsible for the untouchable status of the Pariahs.

⁶⁹ Gopal Chettiar, *AdiDravidargalin Poorviga Sarithiram*, Tamizh Kudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2007 (Second Edition), p. 18.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 22.

when there are land disputes or certain functions of important temples across the Tamil region, it is the Pariahs who are called.⁷¹ The author wants to prove that the Pariahs had a respectable status in the Tamil society, before they were pushed to social degradation by the brahmins.

Chettiar says that the Aryans migrated from Central Asia, 3000 years back, settled in the region north of the Vindhyas and River Narmada and named the region *Aryavarta*. In the south, the Dravidians did not have caste practices, or any restrictions of inter-marriage and they had trade links through sea, etc. They were a much advanced society than the Aryans which is acknowledged in Aryan texts like *Manudharma Shastra* and *Ramayana*.⁷² The author opines that the Aryans first came to south India as travelers, who were called as *Mlecha*⁷³ and *Sura*⁷⁴ by the Dravidians. According to the author, over a period of time the Aryan myths and texts took over the respective Tamil counterparts and that is how caste system entered the Tamil society. The spread of Jainism did push caste to the background to certain extent, but their preaching of vegetarianism was made use of by the Aryans and the animals which they worshipped like 'cow' were made to be sacred. But the Dravidians who continued eating cattle were rendered as untouchables.⁷⁵ Chettiar further argues that the Adi-Dravidas who played the *Parai*, a drum

⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁷³ The Dravidians called the Aryan travelers *Mlecha*, which was a derogatory term, because certain rituals and practices of the Aryans were considered to be degrading. The Dravidians society seems to have been more advanced than that of the Aryans.

⁷⁴ *Sura* is term which referred to Toddy or Liquor. In this context it was meant that the Aryans had the practice of drinking intoxicated liquor.

⁷⁵ Gopal Chettiar, *AdiDravidargalin Poorviga Sarithiram*, Tamizh Kudiarasu Pathipagam, Chennai, 2007 (Second Edition), pp. 29-31.

instrument made out of cow skin, were called 'Pariahs'.⁷⁶ It was also seen during those times many of the Pariahs, especially in the northern parts of TamilNadu, converted to Buddhism and all those persons who converted were also systematically rendered as outcastes by the Aryans.⁷⁷

Perumal Pillai⁷⁸ in 1922 wrote a book titled "*Adi Dravidar Varalaru*" (History of the Adi Dravidas). It was much extensive, well researched and a seminal work, than the earlier studies on the history of the Adi-Dravidas. He divided his book into three parts i.e., geographical, linguistic and racial origins, for tracing the Adi-Dravida history. Tracing it geographically Pillai says, during ancient times a king named *Thrau* entered the southern region of the Indian subcontinent, at the same time a race called *Thramali* entered south and they settled down. The region was named after them as *Thiravidam*, which in due course, and later encounter with Sanskrit, became *Dravidam*. The region of Dravidam encompassed places like present day Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odissa and Dravidam.⁷⁹ Pillai takes a cue from the Report of the 1911 Census and adds that, the most primitive race of India dwells in the oldest geological formation of the country, the medley of forest clear ranges, terraced plateau, and underlying plains which expanses approximately from the Vindhyas to Cape Comorin.⁸⁰ According to Pillai, the Dravidian race is not an homogeneous one.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁷⁸ Thirusirapuram A. Perumal Pillai, was a scholar of Tamil, but also had very good grasp over English language as well. In order to write this book, he had read works of all English scholars, as well as, all the Tamil literature beginning from Sangam period till the ones published in 19th century.

⁷⁹ A. Perumal Pillai, *Adi Dravidar Varalaru*, Arulbarathi Pathipagam, Chennai, 2009, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 11

There are *Seethiya Dravidar*, *Arya Dravidar*, *Mangolia Dravidar*, etc, who have got the nomenclature based on the different regions of the world they migrated from to south India. Pillai argues that ancient migrations brought in different races and since they all settled in the Dravidian land they were called Dravidians. But the original inhabitants of the present Tamil region, before these migrants, are the *Adi-Dravidas*.⁸¹

Talking about the linguistic aspect, Pillai says, the Aryans in the early days could not speak this language. There are certain syllables specific only to Tamil like 'zha' (pronounced as la), and Aryans used consonants in the beginning of their words. The language Tamil was initially pronounced as *ithmil*, then *ithmilam*, which in the due course became *Thrimilam* and then *Dravidam*. Hence the author derives that the place Tamil originated and where it is spoken is *Adi-Dravidam*.⁸² The oldest among all the Aryan epics is Ramayana which mentions about a developed Tamil language. The first grammatical Tamil text is *Silappadikkaram* which is 2000 years old and the Tamil sangam flourished during the Pandian kingdom. Hence the author develops that, Tamil is an ancient language, spoken before any other language, even senior to Sanskrit and the people who spoke Tamil were the *Adi-Dravidas* and the later Dravidian migrant races learnt the language after settling in the *Dravidam*.⁸³

Thirdly explaining the racial aspects, Pillai deals in length about the migrations into *Dravidam*. In this section he picks up the epic Ramayana, in which

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 12

⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁸³ *ibid.*, Pp. 29-36.

he says, Ravana was the king of the Dravidian land and Ram as an Aryan king. He adds that the Aryans were jealous of the progress made by the Dravidian society, the wealth and splendor Hanuman saw when he went to Ravana's palace, the immense agricultural production, developed towns, polity, picturesque landscapes, etc. In order to demean the Ravana, he was portrayed as an Asura, a cruel despot who exploited his people, has ten heads, etc, which the author says was contradictory to what Ravana was.⁸⁴ He also opines that Ravana was an Adi-Dravida because he was ruler of the Adi-Dravidian land. Pillai goes on to say that, Ravana was Saivite and Saivism was the religion of the ancient Tamils. The story of Ramayana according to him was the story of feud between north and south or Aryan vs Dravidian, but also the feud between Vaishnavism and Saivism. He even goes on to say that there are many sources to prove that Saivism was the religion of the Adi-Dravidas and not Buddhism. The period of King Ashoka was much later in history. By that time, the Adi-Dravidas were a developed and flourishing community with their own language and religion.⁸⁵

The nomenclature

The intellectual engagements regarding the nomenclature gave a thrust to the political mobilization of the Adi-Dravidas. The rhetoric in this regard gave a sense of self-respect to the Adi-Dravidas and a community which was subservient to the upper-castes for centuries realized the need for resistance against the opprobrious caste system. On 20th January 1922, Rajah moved a resolution in the Madras Legislative Council for the deletion and substitution of the terms "Panchama" and

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, Pp. 40-45.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, Pp. 48-49.

“Paraya” with the terms “Adi-dravida” and “Adi-Andhra” in the Tamil and Telugu regions respectively.⁸⁶ Opining on this, he said, “We were for a long time called “Parayas”. Whatever the derivation of this name may be, the word conveys everything that is mean and despicable. It means the opposite of all that is holy and respectable. That is why a “Paraya” is regarded as unfit to be even touched with the hand and the so-called high caste man goes and bathes for what he regards as the sin of touching the Paraya.”⁸⁷ So a name was sought which was devoid of caste suggestions and which would rather denote race, origin and geographical position. Further adding to his arguments Rajah opined:

“We are the original inhabitants of this land and we never submitted to the yoke of caste. We are the true descendants of the original inhabitants and the preservers of the Adi-Dravidian civilization. When the question of name for my community which would convey no caste stigma was considered some thirty years ago; we decided that we should call ourselves Adi-Dravidas and we embodied our decision in the name of our Association. When some wanted to call our Association the “Paraya Mahajana Sabha”, we decided to call our Association the “Adi-Dravida Jana Sabha.”⁸⁸

This nomenclature was crucial in taking forward the politics of the movement and also for building a distinct communitarian identity.

⁸⁶ Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 166.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

The issue of nomenclature for the community gave rise to a difference of opinion and opposition among the different leaders of the depressed classes. A gathering of the depressed classes was organized in 1921 by the Adi-Dravida Jana Sabha to protest against a resolution that supported the change of caste names like “Paraya” and “Panchama” to Adi-Dravidas. Leaders like V. G. Vasudeva Pillai, P. Venkatachalam and S. Somu Pillai contended that giving an exclusive Adi-Dravida identity was the opinion of only a section of the community and such efforts could win only special privileges for them, but would not place them in equal footing with the caste Hindus.⁸⁹ They demanded that various organizations of the depressed class should be consulted before taking any decision and such an effort from one section would lead to more communal dissension than concurrence. They were also of the opinion that the term “Dravida” was better suited to convey distinct identity of the depressed classes as the term Adi-Dravida proposed to amalgamate the depressed classes with the aboriginal tribes and other socially depressed communities.⁹⁰ However, the British government did not heed to these protests and the untouchables henceforth were officially termed as ‘Adi-Dravidas’.

The Demand for Education

Ever since the beginning of the Adi-Dravida movement, education has been the utmost priority of the leaders as they saw it as the strongest weapon to rid themselves from the clutches of the caste system. The Adi-Dravida legislators

⁸⁹ Raj Sekhar Basu, *The Making of Adi Dravida Politics in Early Twentieth Century Tamil Nadu*, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 7/8, July-August, 2011, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p. 244.

repeatedly raised issues related to Adi-Dravida education. As a legislator, Rajah promptly opposed the resolution for “Grant-in-Aid Code” which restricted financial aid for private educational efforts. With this the most affected were the missionary run schools and the indigenous schools.⁹¹ This meant that it directly or indirectly affected the interests of the depressed classes, as a large number of children belonging to the Adi-Dravida communities were enrolled in these schools. In other words, it was only the missionary run and indigenous schools which were allowed access to education for students belonging to the untouchable communities.

Rajah also said that elementary education should be made compulsory in schools and the Adi-Dravida students should be provided with one square meal at lunch hour. Rajah also demanded that a compensatory allowance be given to the parents of wage earning children as they will lose this income when the children will be enrolled in compulsory education.⁹² He also insisted on a network of hostels for children belonging to the depressed classes all through the presidency which should be free of cost.⁹³ A resolution was moved in the council in 1921 appealing to the government the exemption of the Adi-Dravida students from the payment of fees for the SSLC examination. A resolution demanding not less than 15 per cent

⁹¹Swaraj Basu (ed.), *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 168.

⁹²H. Bhama, *M.C. Rajah - A Study*, An unpublished MPhil dissertation submitted at the Department of History, University of Madras, 1983, p. 5.

⁹³*ibid.*, p. 6.

seats ought to be reserved for students from the depressed classes in professional educational institutions was moved in 1922.⁹⁴

Addressing the Madras Legislative Council on 23rd March 1926 on the 'Demand on Education', Rajah noted that the Education Ministry in the Government order issued in 1925 stated that it was hard for the depressed class parents to send their children to school because of their economic condition and they are anxious to send their children for wage-earning occupation. Rajah asked that in such a situation how the students belonging to depressed classes will be able to pay even half the fee. The depressed classes clubbed with other backward communities under Rule 92 are economically poor. They cannot be placed on the same level as other backward classes as they are well-to-do classes. His request to the Minister of Education was to convert their sympathies into actions by changing Rule 92 and by granting complete fee concession to the students of the depressed classes. He also assured the Government that every member of the community who will be able to pay the fee will do so and he will not object to the system requiring poverty certificates. As regards the girls, Rajah recognized that the imposition of fees will only make their education increasingly unfeasible.⁹⁵

Ruptures in the Adi-Dravida and Non-brahmin Alliance

The simmering differences between the Ad-Dravida leaders and the Justice Party, which was in a latent form ever since the Montague-Chelmsford reforms and differences over communal representation, became more pronounced after the

⁹⁴ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁹⁵Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 215-216.

Puliyanthope riots. The failure of Justice Party to curb violence against the Adi-Dravidas by caste-Hindus, the differences over the allotment of *darkhast land*, Indianisation of Civil Services, etc, further deepened the divide.⁹⁶ The issue came to the fore when O.P. Thanikachalam Chetty in a speech called for abolition of the Department of Labour. There were virulent attacks by the Adi-Dravida representatives in the legislature on the Justicites. Rajah even declared that, "...We are no longer going to be slaves of any community. We are going to be our own masters, the endeavours of government...will not bear much fruit unless we agitate for our own good."⁹⁷ It is clearly understood that the efforts of the Justicites at forming the non-brahmin bloc had failed. The internal caste and sub-caste divisions within the non-brahmin fold came to the fore and eventually resulted in the divorce between the Dravidian non-brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas.

Conclusion

The political and intellectual churnings during the early decades of the twentieth century, led to the emergence of multiple ideologies, political formations and movements. Primarily it was the sentiment of nationalism which had an overall impact on every region of the subcontinent. In TamilNadu it was the growing emotions of anti-brahminism, which was mainly opposed to the brahmin dominated Congress nationalist movement, that took root in the Tamil society. There were multiple caste organizations which were formed during this period. The Adi-Dravidas aspirations too found space in the public sphere of early

⁹⁶ Raj Sekhar Basu, *Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 261-264.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 263.

twentieth century, but at the same time they had to contend with two dominant ideologies, i.e., Indian nationalism and Dravidian non-brahminism.

In TamilNadu it was Iyothee Thass and the Buddhist movement which set off the emancipatory project of the Adi-Dravidas. Though Tamil Buddhism was primarily a socio-religious critique of the Hindu caste order, it did propound a certain history of the community, which gave them a sense of self-respect and laid foundations for their political mobilization. Iyothee Thass propagated for the conversion of the Adi-Dravidas to Buddhism, as he argued that they were the early Buddhists and were rendered untouchables in the Indian society by the brahmins. Founding of the journal *Tamilan* helped in spreading the ideals of the movement to far-fetched places. The movement faced certain setbacks after his death in 1914, but he had able followers who could revive and establish branches in different parts of the state. The Buddhist movement was synonymous with its mouthpiece, the *Tamilan*, which stopped publishing in 1936. This also signaled the demise of the movement after which many of its recruits became foot soldiers of the Self-Respect movement.

The formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation in 1916, which was later renamed as Justice Party, was the first political formation of the non-brahmins in Tamil Nadu. It was in the same year in which M.C. Rajah revived the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha. The Adi-Dravida leaders in the initial years worked in close coordination with the leaders of the Justice Party. The progressive ideals of the non-brahmin movement seemed to be sympathetic of the Adi-Dravida demands as well, and they tried to incorporate the Depressed Classes into the non-brahmin fold. However, fissures soon emerged between these two formations

because the Justice government, which was formed in 1920, did not address the grievances of the Adi-Dravidas. These simmering differences came into loggerheads during the B&C Mill strikes which saw bloody clashes between the caste-Hindus and the Adi-Dravida workers. The Justicites seem to have supported the caste-Hindu union leaders during these conflicts.

The divide created between these two ideologies, during the Puliyanthope riots, increased in due course. The Adi-Dravida leader's unhappiness over the attitude of the Justice Party leaders in regards to the abolition of the Department of Labour, failure of Justice ministry in controlling the attacks of caste-Hindus on Adi-Dravidas in the rural areas, differences over Indianisation of Civil Services, etc, widened the wedge further. It clearly brought out the internal caste hierarchies within the non-brahmin bloc and it finally resulted in the break in alliance between the Adi-Dravidas and non-brahmins.

The issue of 'Adi-Dravida' nomenclature played a major role in the political emergence of the movement. During the 1920's, a series of conferences, public meetings, and texts were produced on Adi-Dravida histories. Terms like 'Pariah' and 'Panchama' were seen to be opprobrious caste titles, and replacement with the term 'Adi-Dravida' was argued to give the community a sense of self-respect and dignity in the society. The issue of nomenclature was brought up in the legislative assembly by Rajah in 1922, though there was opposition from some of the pro-Congress leaders from the community. The government accepted the resolution and henceforth the title 'Adi-Dravida' came into official parlance.

The Adi-Dravida movement, which during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a socio-religious reform movement, took a political turn in the 1910's. The leaders of the movement tried to align with various political formations, who they felt were sympathetic to the cause of the Depressed Classes, eventually fell out. During the 1920's, the Adi-Dravida intellectuals realized the need for a separate identity and political formation to fight for demands specific to their community; as otherwise it got obfuscated into the movements of the Nationalists or the non-brahmins and the demands of the Depressed Classes were relegated to the margins. Hence, during this period one could witness an increase in the political activities of the Adi-Dravidas, whether it be conferences, public meetings or protest gatherings.

Chapter III

RADICALIZATION OF THE TAMIL POLITICAL SPHERE AND THE ADI-DRAVIDA QUESTION

The beginning of the Self-Respect movement by E.V. Ramasamy (henceforth EVR), marked a radical turn in the politics of Tamil Nadu. Caste became the primary bone of contention and also the basis for the growing sentiments of Tamil nationalism. A new self-respect counter-public emerged which questioned the basis of all on which the caste society was built on. This period also saw the emergence of the communist led labour and peasant movements at the national and regional level. The strong anti-caste movements made Gandhi to rethink his strategies and he was forced to begin an anti-untouchability campaign, with the forming of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. The programs of the Harijan Sevak Sangh became the primary agenda in the activities of the Congress. This chapter studies the period between 1925 to 1937 which saw the establishment of different ideologies in the Tamil public sphere. There were intense intellectual debates on issues confronting the Tamil society, within as well as with other socio-political movements. Hence this chapter also studies the debates surrounding some of the prominent issues like nationalism, political representation, caste, religion, religious conversion, etc.

EVR and radicalization of the Tamil political sphere

EVR believed that the destruction of the caste system was of paramount importance as it promoted hierarchies of *high* and *low*. Emancipation was needed

for all the non-Brahmin castes according to the Self-Respect doctrines and a unity was sought to be established between the *Sudras* and the depressed classes who were classified as untouchables. Untouchability was considered the biggest hindrance to the fulfilment of social justice and economic equality which could not free them from the clutches of the stratified Hindu society.¹

EVR took a strong position against untouchability from 1925. He slammed Gandhi and other Congressmen for doing little to abolish untouchability.² EVR campaigned for deleting problematic words like *Sudra* and *Pariah* from everyday usage and the Self-Respect Movement passed resolutions at its conferences in favour of the temple entry for Adi-Dravidas.³

The idea of *Samadharma* as espoused by the followers of the Self-Respect Movement became central to their mission to abolish the inequalities perpetuated by caste. *Samadharma* ideals focussed on radical means of social interaction and foundations of a new society free of hierarchy. *Samadharma* demands did not limit themselves to the abstract moral argument of equality and emancipation. It also demanded concrete things such as proportional representation for non-Brahmins in the service sector, educational institutions and representative bodies. EVR was of the belief that the untouchables would be immensely benefited by the system of proportional representation. A non-Brahmin cultural alternative was in

¹ See *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium* by V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai. Pp. 350-351.

² EVR cited the reluctance of Gandhi in assenting to temple entry for the Adi Dravidas in Tamil Nadu. See *Collected Works of EV Periyar*, Volume I, 1992. Pp. 68-70.

³ The resolutions were passed in district conferences of the Self Respect movement such as Tirunelveli where EVR proposed the abolition of a Shastra for all practical purposes and temple entry. For more see *Kudi Arasu* (Tamil), October 11, 1927.

the offing if there was an intense campaign by the Adi-Dravida movement in favour of *Samadharna*.⁴

The Congress did not respond too favourably to the idea of proportional representation. It was evident to Periyar that its stand on the abolition of untouchability as ordained by Gandhi was notwithstanding and the Congress was unwilling to do anything substantial in this direction.⁵ EVR therefore came to the conclusion that the Congress and its leader Gandhi were not really interested in a radical transformation of society through the abolition of untouchability. He took particular issue with Gandhi on his continued stand of defending the *Varnashrama* and believed that Gandhi and his outlook would lead to a revival of a fledgling Brahminical order in South India.⁶

From then on, the Self Respect Movement turned decisively against the Congress position of gradualism and left no opportunity to criticise the Congress. The conferences of the movement throughout the Madras Presidency began to actively push for temple entry for the untouchables. One of the prominent examples was the resolution to push for entry of the Adi-Dravidas to the Rockfort Temple at Tiruchirapally.⁷ The upper caste counter offensive focussed on the need

⁴ EVR was of the opinion that had the untouchables been granted proportional representation, they would not be suffering as they did. Hence he advocated for non-Brahmin Hindu castes to give proportional representation to these communities and not repeat the mistakes of the Brahminical society or else they would convert to Islam or Christianity. See V, Geetha and Rajadurai, Op. Cit. Pp. 351-352, *Kudi Arasu* June 17 1928 and February 17 1929.

⁵ See N.K. Mangalamurugesan, *Self Respect Movement*, pp. 47-52.

⁶ *Kudi Arasu*, August 17 and 26 1927; Sitambaranar Samy, *Tamizhar Talaivar*, pp. 102.

⁷ Mangalamurugesan, Op. Cit. pp. 73.

to preserve the sanctity of the Hindu social order and how the issue of temple entry would create divisions and tear apart the fabric of the society.⁸

The EVR led movement meanwhile stepped up the pressure on the Congress with regards to its dilly dallying stance on the attacks committed by the upper castes against the depressed classes.⁹ This was, of course, followed by allegations that the Congress did not do enough for eradicating untouchability. The Congress in return accused the Periyarists of not doing enough to force the Justice Party to initiate legislation in the province themselves to remove the handicap affecting the scheduled castes.

Periyar was of the opinion that the Adi-Dravidas were to play an important role in the coalition of castes against the brahmin hegemony. They were also necessary as a support base to counter the claims of the Congress.¹⁰ Periyar exhorted the Adi-Dravidas to not remain tied to the hegemony of the Hindu social order and if need be, change their religion if temple entry rights were not acceded to. The question of change of religion stirred up a debate in which some of the known Adi-Dravida leaders took the side of EVR.¹¹ While religious conversion was a rhetorical device and tactical posturing to put pressure for change, the activists of the Self Respect Movement on the ground ran organised campaigns for temple entry. This involved

⁸ *Kudi Arasu*, May 13 1928.

⁹ It was not uncommon to see upper caste landlords indulging in violence or other coercive modus operandi against the agricultural labour who were overwhelmingly Dalits. For more on this see P Sundarayya, *Oral History Transcripts*, No. 449. NMML, Delhi. Pp. 14.

¹⁰ B.S. Chandrababu, *Social Justice Question*. Pp, 18.

¹¹ This included prominent leaders like B. Muniswamy Pillai. See *Kudi Arasu*, October 20 1929 and April 19 1931.

inter caste feasts in order to mobilise Adi-Dravida masses.¹² The upper castes in the province, alarmed by the growth of the radical anti-Brahminical sentiment, stepped up counter measures to repress the Adi-Dravidas.¹³ However, such acts only strengthened the appeal of the Self-Respect Movement among the depressed classes and mobilised their opinion based on its egalitarian ideals of a free civil society founded on liberal principles of justice.

The Simon Commission and Adi-Dravidas

The mid 1920's were a time of shifting political terrains in the Madras Presidency. Differences started emerging between the EVR led Self-Respect Movement and the Justice Party. The latter which had championed the voice of reform in the province was now being overtaken by the Congress in popularity. In 1926, the Congress scored a major victory over the Justice Party in the local council elections based on consolidated support in both the cities and the countryside.¹⁴ When the governor of the Madras Presidency invited the Congress to form a new ministry, the party issued strict instructions to members not to accept the offer at any cost. The Governor turned to P. Subbarayan, a former Justice Party member who contested as an independent, to form a ministry of amorphous character in which people like Ranganatha Mudaliar and Arokiasamy Mudaliar were members who had close ties to the Congress. The cabinet pleased most of all the Swaraj Party and its supporters within the Congress which had been pushing for the latter

¹² *Kudi Arasu*, December 22, 1929.

¹³ In Erode for example, Upper Caste men associations filed lawsuits against the Adi Dravidas for purportedly inciting violence and hatred against the higher castes. See *Kudi Arasu*, April 24 1929.

¹⁴ The Congress won 41 seats whereas the Justice Party won only 21. David Arnold attributed the success to the penetration of the Congress into the rural areas on the back of having taken up agrarian issues. See Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad*, pp. 101-102.

to accept governing responsibility under British rule.¹⁵ The ministry was soon engulfed in a crisis as the Swarajists turned hostile and together with the Justice Party tried to initiate a no confidence motion against Subbarayan and his ministry. This upset the Congress which had all along preferred not to oppose the functioning of the ministry and even encouraged it to implement certain populist measures like prohibition of alcohol. The governor, Lord Goschen, came to the rescue of the ministry ultimately and prevented it from falling.¹⁶ EVR was not at all impressed by the manoeuvres of the Swarajists and the dissidents within the Justice Party who wanted to bring down the government.

The Government of India act of 1919 had made a provision that after ten years of passing the act, a statutory commission would be appointed which would review the functioning of the system of government, progress of representative institutions and the advance of education in India. Hence a commission was set up in 1928 under Mr. Simon as the chairman.¹⁷ EVR was firmly of the opinion that due to the impending visit of the Simon Commission to India, the non-Brahmin political formations needed to stay united on a common plank in order to be able to challenge the upper caste supremacist organizations like the *Vranashrama Dharma Sabha*.

The visit of the commission was bound to create rifts and dilemmas. The Justice Party was in two minds as to what course to follow. The ministry was even more divided. The Swaraj Party intended to move a resolution for non-cooperation with

¹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 102-04.

¹⁶ See V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai *Towards a non-Brahmin millennium*, pp. 227.

¹⁷ Sukhdeo Thorat & Narendar Kumar ed., *B. R. Ambedkar: Perspectives on Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policies*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 17-18.

the commission on which many a ministers were considering whether to abstain. Subbarayan considered resignation but was persuaded otherwise by the governor and then sought to reach a compromise. He entered into deliberations with Ramarayingar who was leading the Justice Party at that time. The latter relented and agreed to support the Subbarayan ministry. This was believed in the non-Brahmin political circles of Madras as a scheme to check the purported machinations of the Congress and the upper-caste lobby associated with it to prevent the non-Brahmins from placing their independent political demands before the Simon Commission.¹⁸

Simon Commission and the Depressed Classes

For the untouchables across the country, the formation of the commission was a welcome move. However, there were divergent views within the Depressed Class movement at the national level on the question of political representation. Ambedkar's ideas did not echo the same as the anti-caste intellectuals of Tamil Nadu.

To cooperate with the Simon Commission the Government appointed a committee for the whole of British India and every legislative council elected representatives to the committee. On 3rd August 1928, the Bombay Legislative Council selected Ambedkar along with other members to the Bombay Provincial Committee.¹⁹ In his presentation to the commission Ambedkar opined,²⁰

¹⁸ *ibid.* pp. 229.

¹⁹ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1971, p. 115.

²⁰ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, pp. 351-352.

“Assuming...that separate interests do exist, the question is, are they better promoted by separate electorates than by general electorates and reserved seats? My emphatic answer is that, this separate or special interests of any minority are better promoted by the system of general electorates and reserved seats than by separate electorates... This must be said with certainty that a minority gets a larger advantage under joint electorates than it does under a system of separate electorates. With separate electorates the minority gets its own quota of representation and no more. The rest of the house owes no allegiance to it and is therefore not influenced by the desire to meet the wishes of the minority. The minority is thus thrown on its own resources and as no system of representation can convert a minority into a majority, and it is bound to be overwhelmed. On the other hand, under a system of joint electorates and reserved seats the minority not only gets its quota of representation but something more. For, every member of the majority who has partly succeeded on the strength of the votes of the minority, if not a member of the minority, will certainly be a member for the minority. This, in my opinion is a very great advantage which makes the system of mixed electorates superior to that of the separate electorates as a means of protection of the minority.”

Ambedkar demanded to the Simon Commission for political, educational, employment, and other civil rights.²¹ To the issue raised by his colleagues that franchise be provided only to the educated and the intellectual class, Ambedkar

²¹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, p. 315.

was not in consonance with the view of his colleagues. Rather Ambedkar expressed that the franchise must be extended to all adults, men and women above 21 years of age, because education was not made available to all sections of the society. Hence, he opined that educational qualification should not be the criterion in extending franchise for all.²² Ambedkar also rejected the opinion that legislators can be nominated by the government. A nominated legislator, according to him, would never work for the people and rather will work only in the interest of the government. Therefore, legislators must be popularly elected rather than being mere nominees of the government. In other words, Ambedkar wanted the real voices of the people heard in the law making process. Ambedkar had an apprehension about the Self-Rule, if granted, because it would not allow the real voices of the Depressed Classes. He demanded minority status for the Depressed Classes as he said that the untouchables were different from caste Hindus in all spheres of life. According to him, political power is essential to emancipate the Depressed Classes from the clutches of the brahminical society.²³ Thus Ambedkar deemed that reforms are necessary to have true representation of the untouchables.

Ambedkar contended that the religious minorities were far more advanced than the depressed classes. Ironically, the Muslims were given more seats than in proportion to their population; whereas, the Depressed Classes were allotted only 7 out of a total 791 seats by the Minto-Morley Reforms Committee. For him, rather than considering merely the numerical strength of a community, educational

²² *ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

and economic status must be taken into account for granting political rights.²⁴ Ambedkar proposed that the constituencies must be clearly demarcated before announcing the election schedule. The constituencies, he said must be marked out, based on the concentration of the Depressed Class population in the particular constituencies.²⁵

Reaction of the Adi-Dravidas

The Adi-Dravidas were even more receptive and their leader M.C. Rajah called upon all those upholding the interests of the depressed classes to cooperate with the commission.²⁶ Swami Sahajanandam appealed to the government that M.C. Rajah be appointed as one of the members of the commission from a native perspective.²⁷ Rajah was clear about the stand that the scheduled castes of the Madras Presidency could not support the call of the Congress to boycott the Simon Commission. The debates regarding this were carried on in the chamber of the assembly where Congress and Swaraj Party legislators countered the Adi-Dravida leadership on its stand. Swami Venkatachalam Chetti, a prominent Congressman from the Telugu speaking regions of the province, opined that it would be impertinent for the depressed classes to support a foreign government merely for certain privileges acceded in their favour.²⁸ The depressed classes and their leadership were prompt in declining to accept the Congress reasoning. N. Sivaraj pointed out that although not opposed to the freedom of India, the scheduled castes

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 344-347.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 429-439.

²⁶ *Madras Mail*. January 4, 1928.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Madras Mail*, January 26, 1928.

could not refuse the opportunities the commission would give to their community for political advancement.²⁹ R. Srinivasan was more categorical in his assertion that a caste ridden Indian nation could not assuage their concerns regarding the need for equality and hence it would be a blunder to join in the Congress call.³⁰

The Congress, thus, largely failed to mobilise the Adi-Dravidas in favour of the boycott call. The rift between the scheduled caste leadership and the Congress grew wider when one of the prominent leaders associated with the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Central Sabha, M.C. Madurai Pillai, organised public meetings in support for the formation of a Central Federation for expressing the views of the depressed classes before the commission. The depressed classes leaders went one step further and began mobilizing the Adi-Dravidas converted to Christianity in favour of the Simon Commission.³¹

The Congress was, hence, unable to have much headway in terms of getting the boycott call implemented among the depressed classes of Tamil Nadu. This was largely attributed to the urban base of the movement. The urban leadership of the Congress was overwhelmingly in Brahmin hands and hence paid lip service to the reformist agenda of Gandhi which were meant to reach out to the non-Brahmin, predominantly rural masses. The local leadership was moreover very proactive in mobilising for the Salt Satyagraha which diverted attention from taking up any issues which could cut ice with the depressed classes.³² The Nehru report commissioned by the party to look into the grievances of the untouchables did not

²⁹ *Madras Mail*, January 27 1928.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Madras Mail*, 8 July 1928.

³² See All India Congress Committee Papers, G 116-G 123, 1930. NMML Delhi.

help matters by denouncing the demand by Ambedkar for a separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes. Its publication made any accommodation between the nationalist agenda and the need for uplifting of the depressed classes seem difficult.³³ The scheduled castes deposed before the commission and a majority of their associations argued for stronger and guaranteed representation in central and provincial legislatures. They also demanded that local bodies and various executive branches of the governors and the Viceroy should have Scheduled Caste representation. However, there were differences on how these affirmative actions were to be implemented.³⁴

The major associations such as the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha and the Madras Arundhathi Mahajana Sabha, advocated strongly that a mixed system of election and nomination be ensured for the participation of the Scheduled Castes in the process of governances and legislation. In a memorandum jointly submitted to the commission, both associations argued that of the one fourth of the total seats they felt the community was entitled to fully, half may be nominated and the other half elected.³⁵ The reasons for the demand and a context were set in a supplementary memorandum to the commission wherein it was noted that the depressed classes needed to be alleviated out of their gravely poor socioeconomic position. It was

³³ The Nehru Report underlined the theme of the Congress ideological construct by stating that separate electorates would lead to conflict and disharmony in the society due to a clash between the majority and the minority of the people. It suggested that instead of special formal mechanism for safeguarding of the depressed class interest, special measures should be taken to alleviate the status of the Harijans. See S.K, Gupta, *The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics: Their Emergence as a Political Power*, Delhi 1985. Pp. 241.

³⁴ Some associations wanted a greater role for themselves as intermediaries in selection of candidates for the seats to be filled by the community. They also advocated a system of half-nomination and half-election which would ensure they held clout over the community. See Atul Chandra Pradhan, *The Emergence of the Depressed Class*, Delhi 1986. Pp. 118-119.

³⁵ Memorandum Submitted by the Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha on February 26 1929. *Indian Statutory Commission* Volume XVII, Part I. HMSO London, 1930. Pp. 284.

argued strongly that landed interests within the upper caste were dominant enough to influence the voting of the depressed classes and make the entire process a mockery. They also pointed out to the need for training the depressed classes in matters of governance and the functioning of self-government institutions before being given responsibility. Hence, the associations asked for a say in selection of candidates until in their mind that consciousness had emerged within the community. They demanded that the task of nomination should be delegated to the Madras Depressed Classes Federation which would select and forward names for approval.³⁶

However, it was not that there was unanimity among the various factions of scheduled caste leadership on issues. N. Sivaraj favoured the recommending role of the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes Federation in matters related to the selection of depressed class candidates. M.C. Rajah was however opposed to this idea. Dispute also arose between the two regarding the number of seats the depressed classes should get in the legislature. Sivaraj sided with some non-Brahmin middle caste leaders to state that the number could be eighteen. Rajah however was categorical that the number could not be less than one fifth of the total number of legislative seats which came to twenty four. There were also differences between Rajah and others over the provision of separate electorates.³⁷

The Simon Commission placed its report for public consideration in May 1930. The Congress was critical and called it a tool to assuage particularist interests and create divisions between the Indian people. The report however did manage to cut

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 278.

³⁷ Ibid. Pp. 281-282.

some ice with leaders of the depressed classes throughout India. In Madras, the report and the government were showered with praise by Hindus and Christians of the depressed classes alike for showing commitment to emancipate them from their conditions. The Congress obviously got flak for being an obstacle to progress for the depressed classes by raising the banner of Poorna Swaraj.

On 29th June 1929, the Madras Provincial Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha passed a resolution in its General Body Meeting that it disagreed with the Congress call for Civil Disobedience.³⁸ A section of the supporters of this resolution in Madras even pressurized the All India Scheduled Caste Federation to declare support to the British Government. District level meetings began to be organised praising the benevolence of the British. One of them is to be noted as it praised the government for nominating Rao Bahadur R. Srinivas as a delegate for the Round Table Conference to be held in London.³⁹

The British Government through the Indian Central Committee also presented its report on the issue. It rejected the proposal of nominations as there was no unanimity on the issue between Scheduled Caste leaders themselves. It stated its opposition to the principal of separate electorates as promoting sectarianism but nevertheless recommended their implementation in Madras since it felt the community there was better educated and hence better able to serve its interests than in any other part of India.⁴⁰ The proposition was also acceded to by the provincial government of Madras which felt that separate constituencies were

³⁸ Reforms Office File 163/111/30-R. National Archives, Delhi.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Indian Central Committee*, HMSO London, 1929. Pp. 44.

possible if there were sufficient number of Scheduled Caste voters in a given area.⁴¹ Thus it was agreed that separate electorates should be created as per possibilities and wherever there was little scope the gap could be filled by nominations. The government had obviously been greatly influenced by the activism of the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes Association on this issue. R. Srinivasan, the Federations leader, was sceptical regarding reservation of seats in joint electorates. The Federation was of the view that the seats allotted were clearly not enough and that separate electorates should at least temporarily be put in place as an educative measure for ten years and reservation should be decided on the basis of the numerical strength the community as well as the handicap faced by them in a particular region.⁴²

It was mostly the prevalence of personal jealousies and intrigues leading to factionalism, that prevented the Scheduled Castes from acting as one united bloc and wresting more political and constitutional safeguards out of the colonial government. Thus they had to bring out frequent statements to convey a sense of unity of purpose and desire among the various groupings representing the community interests.⁴³

Rajah and Ambedkar: convergences and divergences

The question of separate electorates could be said to be the most important political agenda of the depressed class movement in colonial India. There was an overwhelming unanimity among the various depressed class organizations

⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 382.

⁴² Reform Office File. Op. Cit.

functioning in different regions of the country for the need of political representation through separate electorates. Even though the demand for separate electorates was conceded to religious minority groups, similar demand was not adhered to by the colonial government vis-a-vie the untouchables. Even after repeated deliberations and representations to the colonial government, the demand was not met; the final outcome was an agreement of holding elections through the system of 'Joint Electorates'.

The demand for separate electorates was first heard in the Indian political sphere when Sir Agha Khan demanded it for the Muslims on 1st October 1906 in a meeting with Lord Minto in Shimla. The demand for adequate representation for the depressed classes in the legislative bodies was put forth by Dr B.R. Ambedkar in 'Evidence before the Southborough Committee on Franchise'. Though he was referring to the Bombay council, it had implications throughout the country. Historian Sermakani in an article points out that the demand for separate electorates for the depressed classes was first passed by the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha at a meeting held in Madras in 1927. Ambedkar, in his evidence before the Commission on 23rd October 1928 briefly explains the necessity of electoral reforms for the untouchable communities. He stated that, "The first thing I would like to submit is that we claim that we must be treated as a distinct minority, separate from the Hindu community. Our minority character has been hitherto concealed by our inclusion in the Hindu community, but as a matter of fact there is really no link between the depressed classes and the Hindu community. The first point, therefore, I would stress before the Conference is that we must be regarded as a distinct and independent minority. Secondly, I should like to submit that the

depressed classes minority needs far greater political protection than any other minority in British India, for the simple reason that it is educationally very backward, that it is economically poor, socially enslaved, and suffers from certain grave political disabilities, from which no other community suffers. Then I would submit that, as a matter of demand for our political protection, we claim representation on the same basis as the Mohammedan minority. We claim reserved seats if accompanied by adult franchise.” On asked if there was no adult franchise Ambedkar replied, then the demand would be for separate electorates.

Round Table Conferences

Round Table Conference was one of the significant events in the history of modern India, particularly in respect to the depressed classes. It was held by the British Government for framing the future constitution of India. Ambedkar’s concern during the Round Table expanded from Bombay Presidency to issues concerning the depressed classes at the national level. He argued that the policies of the British government were incompetent and indifferent towards the depressed classes. He reiterated his earlier arguments that solutions to the problems faced by the untouchables were more rooted in political rather than social remedies. He added that the untouchables must acquire power and knowledge in order to reclaim their human personality.⁴⁴ He stated that,

“We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our hands. No share of political power can evidently come to us as the British Government remains

⁴⁴ Sukhdeo Thorat & Narendar Kumar ed., *B. R. Ambedkar: Perspectives on Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policies*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 21.

as it is only in swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting power into our hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people. Depressed by the government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention”⁴⁵

The first session of Round table was conducted in Nagpur under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar where different parties across the nation were invited to speak on the issue. The Simon commission report was released in May 1930 where the aim of Indian nationalism and its force were disregarded. The Round Table Conference consisted eighty nine leaders from different parties representing different interests. Out of these leaders only two i.e. B.R. Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan represented the depressed classes in the conference.⁴⁶ Both the representatives had said in the plenary session of first Round Table Conferences that they were honoured to represent the 43,000,000 depressed classes in future constitution of India. Dr. Ambedkar was also part of the Federal committee, Provincial Constitution committee, Minorities committee, Franchise committee, Defense and Service. Both the leaders together demanded political rights and separate electorates for the depressed classes in the Round Table Conference. Other than this, both the representatives suggested that the form of government must be changed and a government should be formed, which will be,

⁴⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, pp. 506-507.

⁴⁶ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1971, pp. 139-144.

of the people, by the people, and for the people.⁴⁷ Ambedkar theoretically differentiated between the caste Hindus and the Untouchables and demanded minority status for the depressed classes in the conference. He also demanded that untouchability must be abolished and termed as illegal by the future Constitution of India. In the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar opposed the idea of nomination system and proposed a separated electorate system for electing depressed classes as a legislative member.⁴⁸ They proposed a scheme of political safeguards for the protection of the depressed classes in the future constitution of a self-governing India. Eight terms and conditions were put up by depressed classes' representatives in favor of depressed classes under majority rule in a self-governing India. Those eight terms were: conditions for equal citizenship, free enjoyment to equal rights, protection against discrimination, adequate representation in the legislatures, representation in the services, redress against prejudiced actions or neglect of interests, special departmental care and representation of depressed classes in the cabinet.⁴⁹ Some fundamental rights which Ambedkar and Sreenivasan achieved during the Round Table Conference on 19 January 1931 were abolishment of discrimination, adult franchise for depressed classes, approval of political rights for the minority population and recognition of depressed classes as minority. Both the representatives opposed the

⁴⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1982, pp. 507-509.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 528.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 546-553.

present nomenclature of 'Depressed Class' and suggested in future to be addressed as 'non-caste Hindus', 'protestant Hindus', or 'Non-Conformist Hindus'.⁵⁰

In the Round Table conference, stating the position of the Depressed Class representatives in the conference, Ambedkar put forth that, "As to the question of joint or separate electorates, our position is this- that if you give us adult universal suffrage the Depressed Classes, barring a short transitional period which they want for their organization, will be prepared to accept joint electorates and reserved seats; but if you do not give us adult suffrage, then we must claim representation through separate electorates. That is our position."⁵¹ Ambedkar further demanded that the elections must happen through separate electorates for a period of ten years and after which it can shift to joint electorates with seats reserved for Depressed Classes and joint electorates must not be thrust on the Depressed Classes against their will.⁵²

While Ambedkar was initially for joint electorates with proportional reservation in general constituencies and adult franchise, M.C. Rajah on the other hand stood firmly for separate electorates. Rajah in a detailed note on the depressed classes and constitutional reforms in the year 1929, after weighing the pros and cons of various forms of electing members to the assemblies argues that, creation of separate electorates is the right way forward. Practical and theoretical objections rose against the demand of separate electorates. It was said that separate electorates would "perpetuate differences and hinder the growth of nationalism".

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 672.

⁵¹ Dr. BabaSaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2, Maharashtra: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 14th April, 1979, p.533.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 551.

Rajah rebutted these arguments saying that the objections would be counter-balanced by the advantages secured under separate electorates and since the demand is for a temporary period these objections lose their validity. He further pointed as to how separate electorates have benefitted the religious minorities by giving them a sense of security which alone has resulted in the advancement of their communities and similarly when the depressed classes gain sufficient self-confidence and sense of security; the system of separate electorates can give way for joint electorates. There were practical objections raised regarding the difficulty in demarcating the depressed classes in each province, the insufficient voters and as to how these small numbers are scattered which makes demarcating the constituencies impossible. As a solution to the queries, he cited the example of the Madras government which had provided a statement to the Simon commission clearly displaying the district wise voters belonging to the untouchable communities which makes the job of carving out constituencies easier. He advised the same measures be followed in other provinces of British India. He also suggested lowering of franchise which would result in the increase of voting ratio.

There was constant opposition to the demand of separate electorates to the depressed classes from the caste Hindus. The congressmen within the legislative assemblies were one of the biggest hurdles in the realization of this demand. Rajah was always guarded against this fact and time and again reiterated the point of social reform preceding Swaraj. In his speech in the Central Legislative Assembly on 7th March 1931, on the proceedings of the round table conference, he spoke about responsible self-government where he appealed to the upper castes, “Now I say to you who are really interested in the country and in the welfare of

the nation that you should prepare yourselves for responsible Self-Government, and more especially for social solidarity through the breaking down of the caste system as it obtains at present in our country, and this can be brought by a moral revolution, the sacrifice of selfishness; and the sooner this ban of untouchability is removed, the nearer will you be to the goal of complete Dominion Government for India. Unless you do this, India cannot be free, no matter how much Self-Government she obtains now.”

He further spoke about constitutional safeguards and the importance of separate electorates. Responding to the questions posed by caste Hindus, he stated, “Sir, the caste Hindus ask us: “Why do you want safeguards? Why do you want Separate Electorates?” Might I ask them, Sir, in reply, what would they want, if like us they were held in subjection by long standing custom by the domineering classes against their will? What would they want if they were exploited? If they were intellectually starved? If they were denied the benefits of schools, roads, wells, temples? If we now ask for safeguards, it is not our fault. That fault is to be laid at their doors. Sir, for the successful working of responsible government, the contentment of all classes is very essential and it would be only wise to grant the community its desires. Why force an unwanted system upon us? It would be far better to foster the growth of confidence by removing all suspicions of majority manipulations, by granting to us Separate Electorates. The moment our confidence in their sense of equity, justice and fair play grows to such an extent as would render Separate Electorates unnecessary, rest assured, we will not hesitate to join them in joint electorates. At present as the community is so weakly represented in

the electorates and so little versed in the craft of the politician, it should be given the protection and the sense of security afforded by the Separate Electorates.”

After few months of the First Round Table Conference, delivering the Presidential address at the 9th session of the All India Depressed Classes Conference on 31st October 1931, M.C. Rajah took offence to Gandhi’s claim at the Round Table that, “the Congress had always stood and still stood for the removal of Untouchability” and “that the Congress has always championed the cause of the Untouchables”. He dismissed the statements as “untrue”, and stated, “.....if he and his followers had devoted one hundredth as much attention to removal of Untouchability as to the promotion of Khadder.” He further opines that, “if Mr. Gandhi really cared more for Swaraj than for power being transferred to the hands of favoured classes in the Country, he would have placed the Removal of Untouchability in the fore-front not merely of the programme of the Congress, but of the activities of the Congress Committees and workers....” Rajah has great regard for Gandhi as a person, but he adds “Beware of Mr. Gandhi the politician”. In response to Gandhi’s threat to resist the demand for separate electorates at the cost of his life, Rajah vehemently emphasizing the need for separate electorates says, “Our sorrows are too deep-seated to be expressed by others. Besides Separate Electorates are Political Schools for educating the Community in the effective exercise of the franchise and effective criticism of the action of its representatives. The peculiar position of the Depressed Classes today demands that their interests have to be protected against the Hindu co-religionists. In a Joint Electorate where the voters were actuated by common interests division will follow opinions about the merits of the issues involved; and where conflict of interests is involved the voting will go by interests,

and it is clear that minority interests will never succeed in getting representation. In the Joint Electorates, the proportion of Depressed Class voters would be small and the candidates who would fill the Reserved Seats would in reality be the nominees of the majority of the Electors. The constituencies being predominantly Caste-Hindu, no one could hope to get elected who did not pander to or at least respect Caste prejudices. A Depressed Class member elected on the strength of the Caste-Hindu votes would not be beholden to his community. There is thus the danger of the seat being occupied by the dummies of the so-called higher castes. Where he is afforded the protection of Separate Electorate this danger disappears.”

On the future course of action, Rajah contended that the Untouchables should ally with the Muslims, Anglo Indians and Indian Christians, protest against the imposition of Joint Electorate by which the Hindu majority seeks to come to power with which they could oppress the marginalized sections of the society.

Rajah who championed the cause of separate electorates changed his support to the system of joint electorates after the conclusion of the Round Table conferences because of disappointment over signing of the unsatisfactory “Minorities Pact”. The communalists in the conference were able to persuade both the delegates of the depressed classes to sign and support the pact. Expressing his disappointment over the pact Rajah said, “... when the allocation of seats to the several communities proposed in the pact was studied closely, it was found that in most provinces the Depressed Classes were getting less than they should get on the population basis, whereas the other minorities like the Muslims and Europeans made themselves sure of getting as much and even more. This gave room for serious thought among the Depressed Classes and other leaders outside the

Conference. They began to suspect and the suspicion soon came to be a conviction that they were being let down by the Depressed Classes delegates at the Conference and their interests unwisely sacrificed.”

Separate electorates were seen by the leaders of the depressed classes, especially by M.C. Rajah, as a prerequisite for the creation of a political community of Adi-Dravidas. Their demand was based on the understanding that Adi-Dravidas had been denied access to education, were economically backward and socially oppressed and they were entirely separate from caste Hindu society. They also considered it to be a safeguard against majoritarian rule by caste Hindu leaders. Moreover, they feared the system of joint electorates as the nationalist mainstream represented by the Congress had not taken a consistent position on the Adi-Dravidas and untouchability. The leaders thought that a system of joint electorates would result in the subversion of the Adi-Dravida cause as candidates who were “yes-men” of the Congress would be elected.

However, Gandhi vehemently opposed ‘separate electorates’ for depressed classes in the Second Round Table Conference. However, the then prime minister who was also the acting Chairman of the Minorities Committee, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, announced “communal award” on 17th August 1932 which gave separate electorates and minority status to the depressed classes. The Communal Award gave separate electorates to Muslims, Indian Christians, Sikhs, Europeans and Anglo-Indians. Mr. Gandhi declared ‘fast unto death’ on 20th September 1932, protesting against the separate electorate system for depressed classes. Dr. Ambedkar agreed for a pact in infeasible circumstances with Gandhi in favor of ‘Joint electorates’ which is well known in history as the ‘Poona Pact’. The

deliberations were held on 24th September 1932 at Poona Yeravada prison and the pact was signed on 25th September 1932 between Madan Mohan Malaviya on behalf of the caste-Hindus and Dr. Ambedkar on behalf of the depressed classes. According to the pact, seats would be reserved on the basis of Joint electorates for depressed classes, out of the total number classified as general seats. The British Government declared on 26th September 1932 that the Joint electorate had been recommended to parliament.⁵³

On the question of religious conversion

The question of religious belonging of the Adi-Dravidas came to the fore during the 1930s. The issue of religious conversion of the Depressed Classes raked up a political storm when Ambedkar on 13th October 1935 at Yeola in Nasik district, gave a clarion call to the untouchables to leave Hinduism and convert to any other religion which would embrace them as equal citizens and provide them a sense of security.⁵⁴ He pointed to the socio-economic, political and educational backwardness of the untouchables and their struggle for dignity and self-respect was because of their staying within the Hindu fold. Ambedkar said, the reason for these disabilities were the consequence of them being within the Hindu fold and time has come for making the final decision.⁵⁵ It was in this speech Ambedkar famously said, though his birth into an untouchable community was not in his

⁵³ Sukhdeo Thorat & Narendar Kumar ed., *B. R. Ambedkar: Perspectives on Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policies*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 25-27.

⁵⁴ Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Vol.17, Part III, Maharashtra: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee Higher Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003, p.95.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 95.

hands, but he solemnly pledged that he will not die as a Hindu.⁵⁶ Though he was speaking in the context of Maharashtra, it had a pan Indian significance. It should also be noted that in 1930s Ambedkar spoke about religious conversion alone, while he did not advocate which religion one should embrace.

Ambedkar convened another conference on 30 – 31 May 1936 in Dadar, Bombay, to assess the support he would get from the Depressed Classes for his conversion movement.⁵⁷ He opined that religious conversion be understood as two aspects, “Social as well as Religious” and “Material as well as Spiritual.”⁵⁸ Ambedkar says that caste-Hindus use violence when untouchables claim their right of enrolling their children in school, to draw water from wells, to take a marriage procession, etc. These are common social disabilities, but he draws attention towards other type atrocities. If the Depressed Classes try wearing clothes of better quality, use utensils made of metal, wear the sacred thread, walk through the village roads with shoes and socks, do not bow in front of the upper-castes, when untouchable houses are burnt because they bought land for cultivation, etc., he points out that these are attacks of different nature.⁵⁹ In cases when physical attack is not possible, Ambedkar says that ‘boycott’ is used as a weapon.⁶⁰

Ambedkar theorizes that, “The problem of the Untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is a struggle between Caste-Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 117.

matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another.”⁶¹ However, he says that this class struggle in India is deeply intertwined with social status. The struggle begins immediately when an untouchable claims equal status as others. Ambedkar further argues that, in all the above mentioned cases “...you spend your own money. Why then the high caste-Hindus get irritated? The reason for their anger is very simple, your behaving on par with them insults them. Your status in their eyes is low, you are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung, then alone, they will allow you to live happily. The moment you cross your level, the struggle starts.”⁶²

Ambedkar emphasizes that untouchability is not a practice which will end soon, it is a perennial evil. This is because the religion which has placed the untouchables in the lowest rung, according to caste-Hindus, is a permanent one. Hence, the struggle between the higher and lower castes would be an eternal phenomenon and the untouchables are bound to be confined to the lowest rung of the society forever.⁶³ Ambedkar opines that nobody in the country comes in support of people who are in poverty or face repression; even if they come, it is only for persons belonging to their own caste or religion. If not they would say that they cannot interfere in internal affairs of other religions or communities. Therefore, Ambedkar justifies conversion saying that, “...unless you establish close relations with some other society, unless you join some other religion, you cannot get the strength from outside. It clearly means, you must leave your present religion and assimilate yourselves with some other society. Without that, you

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.118.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.118.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.118.

cannot gain the strength of that society. So long as you do not have strength, you and your future generations will have to lead your lives in the same pitiable condition.”⁶⁴

Differing from Ambedkar, M. C. Rajah did not advocate change of religion for the amelioration of the depressed classes; rather he stood for reform within the Hindu society. He said that people involved with the depressed classes will recognize that they are passing through a phase in history, when they adopt and adapt Hindu customs, ceremonies and worships suiting their socio-religious requirements and every Cheri and Basti will have a temple.⁶⁵ Rajah firmly believed that cutting away from Hinduism only leaves the depressed classes with two options – the Muslims or the Sikhs whom according to Rajah are the bidders of communal migration, wrongly termed conversion. Rajah further stated that Hinduism being their sacred religion too, they should not cut off from Hinduism, but need a better recognition and equality with the Caste Hindus.⁶⁶ Rajah stated that,

“... While I fully share in the resentment which many of our men feel in the treatment meted out to our people in many parts of the country by the so-called high caste Hindus, I would at the same request them to compare conditions existing now with what they were, say 15 years ago. Conditions have improved considerably today. A large section of educated Hindu India has come to condemn the practice of Untouchability and has thrown its

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp.121

⁶⁵ Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 134.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 136.

weight on the side of the reform that has been noticed in regard to our conditions and status, the days of Untouchability as practiced towards our community are now numbered. It should be remembered that in the course of a decade things have changed considerably in favour of the Depressed Classes and there is also a very strong awakening among the Depressed Classes themselves.”⁶⁷

Rajah held that people have the freedom to embrace any religion they wish for their spiritual well-being. However Rajah believed that when Congress inspired by Gandhi had taken up the question of the eradication of Untouchability, it was the duty of the depressed classes to facilitate it and not to create obstacles.⁶⁸

Conclusion

It is quite evident that the positions of the Adi Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu was evolving rapidly according to the political situation in the country. The clash between the Congress and its perceived all encompassing role as the arbiter of the national movement with the aspirations of the depressed classes took dramatic turns. The Poona Pact in particular was a situation wherein confronted with the impending danger of the depressed classes breaking away from the Hindu fold in political terms, the Congress under Gandhi did all it could to not let it happen. The subtle differences between Ambedkar and M.C. Rajah on the question firstly of separate electorates and then conversion were to be noted.

⁶⁷ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁸ibid., p. 132.

Rajah had always been in favor of separate electorates while Ambedkar came round to the idea quite late. However, it is quite paradoxical that Rajah did not support conversion of the Adi Dravidas away from the Hindu fold in even as it appears his unequivocal stand convinced Ambedkar to drop the support for joint electorates. Ambedkar also seems to have firmed up his position against the Congress and the Hindu social order after the Poona Pact and the Round Table Conferences as he realized that it was a political tool to counter the upper caste pressure regarding not breaking ranks on the question of Indian Nationalism.

In the 1920s, the politics of the Dravidian parties or allied movements like EVR and his Self Respect movement were not vocally advocating for a separate ethno national state and hence it seems that even within Tamil Nadu the immediate question in front of the Adi Dravidas was that of confronting the conundrum of Indian Nationalism. In that respect the stance of M.C. Rajah and N. SArinivasan suggests that they were far from enamored by the idea of an independent India where the role of the arbiter of justice could go from the British inevitably into the hands of the upper castes who were the dominant social force. The need for extracting as much out of the Simon Commission or the Round Table Conferences was hence predicated on the mistrust the Adi Dravidas had towards any reforming tendencies within the Congress.

The coming years, especially after the passage of the Government of India Act In 1935 and the formations of responsible ministries at provincial levels by the Congress were going to throw even starker light on those issues.

Chapter IV

Depressed Class Politics between 1937-1950

The early 1930's, saw the rise of EVR led Self-Respect Movement, but the fortunes of the Justice Party had been on a steady decline. Post Poona Pact and Gandhi upping the ante on social reform, by the increased activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in the Madras region saw the rise in popularity of the Congress. The Congress won the 1937 elections and Rajagopalachari was made the Prime Minister. This period also witnessed the radicalisation of Tamil political sphere with the formation of the Dravida Kazhagam (henceforth DK), which put forward the demand of separate statehood and also the increased agitational politics of the communists. This chapter would focus on how the Adi-Dravida leaders engage with the nationalist Congress government in taking forward their demands, the separatist politics of the DK and the class politics of the communists.

Adi-Dravidas and the Congress Ministry

Rajagopalachari and his new Congress ministry in the Madras Presidency encountered an immediate problem with regard to the upliftment of the Adi Dravidas. It had to contend with competing interest groups within the society which were also represented in the ministry as factions. In order to reach out to the depressed classes, he appointed V.I. Muniswamy Pillai, a prominent Adi Dravida leader to his cabinet. Hence a lot of Adi Dravidas began to swing towards the Congress. The activists and the leaders of the Congress within the Scheduled

Castes, buoyed by the outreach program began to organise to convert the community into loyal Congress supporters.¹

But the issue of Temple Entry vexed Rajagopalachari up to no end. He was fearful that any legislation in favour of Temple Entry for the depressed classes might result in an upper caste backlash. The dilemma of his ministry meant that Gandhi had to enter the debate. Gandhi acted as the saviour of his protégé by stressing that the ministry was responsible to all castes and creeds and hence could not impose a blanket order to open temple entry to Harijans.² He was however clear on the point that the new Congress ministries had to do more to create favourable conditions for opening up temple entry to the Harijans.

Sanatanist Hindus started organizing themselves to mount a vociferous opposition to any potential moves in that direction by the government. Prominent landlords like the Rajah of Kollengode provided the heft for the organizational leaders to call upon all Hindus to stick to Sanatanist doctrines.³ The Sanatanis were bound to get further enraged when the bill was introduced in provincial legislature and the debates between the reformers and the conservatives became more heated.

The pro-Congress Adi-Dravida leaders like V.I. Muniswamy Pillai were predictably outraged by the intransigence of the upper caste leaders. He also at the same time exhorted the untouchables to distance themselves from what he

¹ VI Muniswamy and his fellow Adi Dravida Congressman BS Murthy campaigned consistently in favour of the Rajaji ministry as the greatest benefactors of the Scheduled Castes with their uplift programs. See *MLAD*, Volume III, 1937, p. 1054.

² *Madras Mail*, August 30, 1937.

³ A prominent Sanatan Hindu leader by the name of Devidas Madhowji Thackersay contended that while the Sanatanis do not stand in the way of untouchables seeking *mukthi*, they cannot allow temple entry as it was inconsistent with the worship mode as prescribed by the *Shastras* for different castes.

perceived as the polarizing rhetoric of the non-Congress Adi Dravida leader M.C. Rajah and the emerging national leader of the untouchables, B.R. Ambedkar. He called on them to disentangle from this camp and aid the implementation of the Poona Pact.⁴

The Congress leadership was in two minds about the feasibility of enacting a Temple Entry Bill as it would antagonise the upper caste support the party had. The Adi Dravida leadership was in contrast favourable to immediate passage as it would result in a dramatic improvement in the status of the community. One of these leaders was R. Srinivasan who despite his staunch anti-Congress plank believed that the act was a step in the right direction.⁵

The dilemma continued however and this created a rift between the Congress and the Adi Dravida leaders. Rajah was vocal in his criticism of the dilly dallying by the Congress leadership. The upper caste Congress ministers did not help matters by conveying an impression that they were in cahoots with the Sanatanists. Even to the pro-Congress moderate Adi Dravida leaders that there was a bonhomie between the government and the Sanatanist reactionaries.⁶ The impression was strengthened by the belief that the Rajaji ministry was essentially a front for the landed interests of the upper castes and hence was succumbing to them. Thus it was claimed that the attitude of the government could hardly help in the improvement of the Scheduled Caste socio-economic affairs.

⁴ *Madras Mail*, December 29, 1937.

⁵ *ibid.*, January 3, 1937.

⁶ See *M.C. Rajah Papers*, The Correspondences of M.C. Rajah with M.K. Gandhi, 1938. NMML, Delhi.

Thus M.C. Rajah took matters into his own hands and introduced a bill in the assembly which sought the end of prohibition for the scheduled castes to enter Hindu temples. He said while tabling the bill, "...this Bill is not a piece of compulsory legislation. It only provides for the practical expression of the people's desire when they wish to allow Depressed Class people to join them in worship in their temples. To describe this as an interference with religion is to misrepresent it altogether."⁷ He added that, 'usages' and 'customs' have got predominance over 'law' and 'reform'. Whenever a reform is sought, despite having popular public support, the British courts have prevented and penalised the reformers, by citing usages and customs. When the legal system is in such a state it becomes prerogative of the legislature to ensure the enactment of reforms.⁸ Rajah wanted a select committee comprising him, Rajagopalachari, V.I. Muniswamy Pillai, Rukmini Lakshmi pathi and Swami A. Sahajanandam to scrutinise the bill and propose a way forward.⁹ In his introduction to the bill, Rajah asserted that grievances of his community had been side lined and the Congress ministry failed to act.¹⁰

The government now had a lot at stake regarding the bill. In a welcome change, the public mood decisively started shifting favourably because of the vocal upper caste reformists supporting Temple Entry. They combined with the

⁷ Swaraj Basu (ed)., *An Unforgettable Dalit Voice: Life, Writings and Speeches of M.C. Rajah*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2012, p. 282.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 283.

⁹ See *MLAD*, Volume VI, 1938. pp. 1169-1170.

¹⁰ Rajah brought attention to a 1932 resolution in a conference at Bombay urging Hindus peacefully facilitate a transition in the society to end the handicap of the untouchables, *ibid.*, pp. 1170.

Adi-Dravida members in the assembly to see to it that the bill got through.¹¹ The Adi-Dravidas while pressing for temple entry legislation, put the ethical onus of following the doctrines of Gandhi in the newly formed ministries. They also cited the examples of princely states in some cases opening up certain temples to all castes and creeds. They pointed to the still prevalent upper caste bias which had hitherto prevented any change in the fortunes of the depressed classes.¹²

The bill became a signifier of competitive political interests desiring to be seen as championing the cause of the Scheduled Castes. The Justice Party attempted to showcase its sincerity for the depressed classes by supporting the bill. But the Congress by supporting the bill and invoking the Gandhian legacy was in a better shape to reap the dividends by not only supporting the bill but convincing the masses that it was a long due process beneficial for social improvement of everyone. It sought to portray itself as a champion of the interests of all classes.

The missionary zeal of the Congress to support the bill put the onus on its rivals to rise to the occasion. EVR was bitter in his criticism of the Congress and warned the Adi-Dravidas to remain careful of the Congress plan to fulfil their own agenda by pretending to promote their welfare. The magazine of the Self-Respect Movement, *Viduthalai* started a counter offensive by arguing about the role of the Self Respect Movement in the temple entry movements of Travencore and

¹¹ This was corroborated by Rajah himself who opined that prominent political and religious organizations had backed the Social Disabilities Bill, *ibid.*, p. 1175.

¹² Since Rajagopalachari was a disciple of Gandhi, he was called upon to act in all sincerity to see that his ministry was proactive for social justice, *ibid.*, pp. 1178-1180.

Madurai.¹³ The call for Swarajya was also ridiculed by the EVR led movement as a ploy to establish upper caste hegemony.¹⁴

Phase of Militant Tamil Nationalism

The Congress led government in their two years of rule tried to bring a few reforms and legislations against the social discrimination of the Adi-Dravidas, one of which was the Temple Entry Legislation. After the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) decision for the Rajagopalachari government to step down, new political alliances got formed in Tamil Nadu. Emerging as the major leader of opposition against Congress, EVR sought to politically mobilize the lower castes in favour of the demand for a separate Dravidanadu.

EVR sought to bring all non-Brahmin communities under a broad political platform, with a rigorous political campaign done throughout the Tamil districts in August 1940.¹⁵ EVR and the activists of the Self-Respect movement, supported the demand of separate electorates for the Adi-Dravidas and appealed to all the sections to wholeheartedly support and participate in the movement for the

¹³ See *Viduthalai* (Tamil Magazine) issue of 15 July 1939 for instance where a proponent of the Self Respect Movement claimed that EVR was the real reason behind the success of the Travencore and Madurai Temple Entry Movement but did not get his due credit and the Brahmin Congress leadership had appropriated the movement for political expediency.

¹⁴ *Viduthalai*, 28 October 1939.

¹⁵ In a speech delivered in Erode, E.V.R. strongly criticized Gandhi, Rajagopalachari and other prominent leaders of the Congress for misleading the Tamil people in the name of nationalism. He expressed the opinion that the Tamils who were an important constituent of the Dravidian population of south India were deliberately exploited by the Brahmins for fulfillment of their own political interests. See *Viduthalai* (Tamil), 29 August 1940.

creation of separate Dravidanadu, forging a broad based unity of the non-Brahmins, Muslims and Christians.¹⁶

The radical approach and populist methods of the Justice Party could considerably change the political perceptions of the lower castes. Many of the Adi-Dravida leaders who were earlier associated with Congress started maintaining distance from them. While many of them who supported Ambedkar extended solidarity to the British Government's war efforts believing that they would be able to fetch support of the British for their demands. The Adi-Dravida leaders kept their differences away and came together raising issues regarding the upliftment of Adi-Dravidas. Sreenivasan, Sivaraj and Raja jointly backed the demand for separate electorates.¹⁷

The President of Madras Scheduled Caste Association, N. Sivaraj sent telegrams to the Viceroy requesting him to uphold the rights of the depressed classes in the future schemes of the constitutional reforms. Ambedkar and Sivaraj sent a joint request to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League to raise the political demands of the scheduled castes during the talks with the Viceroy. Rajah appealed to the British government to consider Congress' demands just as one section of the public opinion and to take into consideration the opinion of other socio-political organizations. Rajah also pointed out precisely that the government should not compromise on the just demands of the scheduled castes in order to fulfil Congress' demands.¹⁸

¹⁶*Viduthalai* (Tamil), 29 August, 1940.

¹⁷ M.C. Rajah Papers, NMML, New Delhi.

¹⁸ For more details, see *The Madras Mail*, 5 October 1939; *The Madras Mail*, 7 October 1939.

Across Madras, the Adi-Dravida leaders organized Harijan District Conferences and expressed solidarity with the British Government's war effort. In such District Conferences, resolutions were passed appealing to the government to grant more privileges to the 'scheduled castes' for supporting Britain's war objectives. Appeals were also made to the government to appoint the members of the erstwhile 'depressed classes' in the army.¹⁹

The increasing support of the scheduled castes in favour of the British war efforts brought about a considerable change in the perceptions of the colonial bureaucrats. The Government of Madras granted some special concessions to pacify the scheduled castes. The Government of Madras issued orders relaxing age limits for scheduled castes applicants for government employment.²⁰

The Government of India in July, 1941 appointed Ambedkar and Rajah as members to the newly formed National Defence Council. The Government even made a claim that efforts would be made to appoint representatives of the scheduled castes in case there are vacancies in the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Soon after, the increasing presence of Imperial Japan forced the British to start a dialogue with Indian leaders. Sir Stafford Cripps, a Minister in the British Cabinet was sent to India to discuss new constitutional proposals with the Indian

¹⁹ The 'scheduled caste' leaders like R. Sreenivasan wanted the government to employ their community members in the armed forces. In the following months, the 'scheduled caste' leaders were more emphatic in their request to the British Government regarding the recruitment of the Harijans in the army. Swami A.S. Sahajanandam presiding over the South Arcot District Harijan Conference in January, 1941, requested the government to employ more Harijans in the army, for their distinguished services in the past. For more details, see the *Madras Mail*, 15 May 1940; 13 January 1941; 25 April 1941.

²⁰ Eur. D 596/16, Private European Manuscripts, Erskine Collections OIOC, British Library, London. *Fortnightly Report for the First Half of July 1939*.

leaders. The Adi-Dravida leaders in Madras sought to initiate new strategies to take advantage of the talks carried out at the national level. Rajah, having a support base both at the provincial and national level, came to an understanding with Ambedkar to have joint representation of the scheduled castes in front of the Cripps Mission. Ambedkar and Rajah tried convincing Cripps that the scheduled castes were being denied opportunity for choosing their representatives in the existing system of elections. They argued that the existing system was of benefit to the candidates put up by the Congress in the reserved constituencies. The response of Cripps was to take into consideration these demands before taking any step to establish a body to make constitution, as per the principles of the “Draft Declaration”. Cripps also ensured that in case the Viceroy’s Executive Council is expanded, as per the new scheme of constitutional reforms, scheduled caste representatives would be appointed.

Proposals of the Cripps, however, did not meet the aspirations of the scheduled caste leaders. Ambedkar denounced the proposals “as defeatist surrender to the Congress and the Muslim League” and as a betrayal of the interests of the scheduled castes.²¹ Ambedkar, being disappointed with the proposals of Cripps decided to form a national level organization of the scheduled castes. A conference of the same was organized in Nagpur in July, 1942. The conference was attended by representatives from Madras, Punjab, Bombay, Central Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. The conference unanimously criticized the British Government for not taking into cognizance the political interests of the

²¹ Sekhar Bandopadhyay, “Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945-47”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, October 2000, p. 903.

scheduled castes. Gandhi was blamed by Ambedkar for not acknowledging the need of the scheduled castes for separate political representation. Ambedkar's view was supported by the likes of N. Sivaraj, a popular scheduled caste leader of Madras.²²

Rise of Ambedkar as Pan-Indian Leader

The increasing prominence of Ambedkar at the national level had a serious implication for the future of Adi-Dravida politics in Madras. The anti-Congress stand of the Depressed Class leaders who supported Ambedkar at the national level persuaded moderates like M.C. Rajah to take a more radical stand with regards to the integrationist politics of Congress. The decision of the Congress to begin a Civil Disobedience Movement even after the British assured to grant independence to India was criticized by M.C. Rajah.²³

Meanwhile in Madras, the Self-Respect Movement under the leadership of EVR extended their solidarity to the demands of the Adi-Dravida leaders vouching for separate electorates. In order to pressurize the British Government for issuing special constitutional guarantees to the Adi-Dravidas, the self-respecters along with the Madras Adi-Dravida Association observed the "Untouchability Removal Day". In several meetings, resolutions were passed requesting the British Government to use the services of the Adi-Dravidas in the war against Fascist

²² A.C. Pradhan, *The Emergence of the Depressed Classes*, p. 276.

²³ Sekhar Bandopadhyay has argued that scheduled caste politicians were particularly worried over the colonial bureaucracy's attempt to lend credence to the Gandhian position that the salvation of the Harijans lay in their religious integration into the Hindu society. For more details, see Sekhar Bandopadhyay, "Transfer of Power", p. 904.

Germany. Requests were also made to add more Adi-Dravida members into the District Labour Advisory Committees.²⁴

The anti-Congress Adi-Dravida leaders of Madras initiated an alliance with the All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF) at the onset of self-respecters' propaganda. Such an alliance was favoured by the anti-Congress scheduled caste leaders so as to be relevant at the national level. In September, 1944, the anti-Congress scheduled caste leaders raised the demand in the Working Committee of the AISCF that the new Government should have representation of minority communities as per the statutes of the new constitution. They also proposed that the ministers from minority communities should be selected by members of other communities, on the basis of a single transferable vote.²⁵

The Viceroy Lord Wavell, on 14th June 1945, pronounced the Government's plan to reconstitute the Executive Council. An effort was made to ensure the representation of all communities including the scheduled castes in the Council. This decision, however, came under severe criticism and uproar from the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Congress as they saw it as a planned move to annihilate the Hindus. Gandhi strongly opposed this move and voiced that the Congress was a "national party".²⁶

²⁴ In January 1943, in several conferences, the self-respecters adopted resolutions requesting the British Government to remove caste segregation in hotels and restaurants. The self-respecters also undertook campaigns to establish equality of all castes. For more details, see *Viduthalai* (Tamil), 22 January 1943 and of 6 June 1943.

²⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*, Critical Quest, 2006, pp. 346-347.

²⁶ Sekhar Bandopadhyay, "Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945-47", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, October 2000, p. 909.

Wavell, on the other hand request Ambedkar to attend the Shimla Conference representing the scheduled castes and did not back down despite criticisms of the Congress and Hindu Maha Sabha. Ambedkar declined Wavell's request and proposed the President of the Federation, N. Sivaraj as a representative of the scheduled castes to attend the conference. Further, Ambedkar criticized the British Government in the proposed Executive Council,²⁷ for discriminating against the scheduled castes, in matters relating to their representation. Various other scheduled caste organizations subsequently backed the demands of Ambedkar for reserving three seats in the Viceroy's Executive Council for the scheduled castes and telegrams were sent to the Secretary of State demanding the same. N. Sivaraj argued that the scheduled castes were a distinct section in the Indian society which needed to be represented by the AISC. Sivaraj strongly criticized the British Government for trying to pacify the issue of scheduled caste representation in the Council by negotiating for an agreement with Congress and the Muslim League.²⁸

The provincial elections that were announced in 1946 led to a strong rivalry among the Congress and the AISC in Madras. Both the AISC and Congress countered each other aggressively in order to fetch the votes of scheduled castes. The Congress campaigned on Gandhi's efforts against untouchability and the Poona Pact. The Madras Scheduled Caste Federation (hereafter MSCF) and its leaders strongly opposed the Poona Pact as it did not give enough opportunities for

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 910.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 911.

the scheduled caste to elect their own representatives.²⁹ It was also argued that it was the consolidation of caste Hindu votes that led to the landslide victory of the Congress in the 1937 elections. The leaders of the MSCF criticized the Poona Pact strongly by saying that it gave very little opportunities to the scheduled castes to choose their own representatives. They also said that the votes put by caste Hindus in the last elections had led to the Congress's landslide victory in the 1937 elections.³⁰ On the other side, decision of Rajagopalachari to contest elections led to serious discussions within the Congress in Madras and led to severe faction fights within the Congress.³¹

K. Bashyam was popularly regarded as the Congress workers to be their leader in Madras. Several meetings were organized in order put pressure on AICC for the same. However, the High Command of Congress went against the popular sentiment and went by the suggestion of Kamraj Nadar to appoint Rajagopalachari in the Provincial Board which had powers to supervise all electoral matters.³²

The majority of the scheduled caste voters having allegiance to Congress, welcomed the entry of Rajagopalachari. The scheduled caste organizations namely

²⁹The Scheduled caste Congress leaders such as B.S. Murthy issued statements praising the Congress for introducing social legislations at the behest of Mahatma Gandhi. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 8 January, 1946.

³⁰*The Hindu*, 9 January, 1946.

³¹ The anti-Rajagopalachari groups pointed out that since he had opposed the August Resolution of Mahatma Gandhi, he should not be allowed to participate in any of the political programmes of the Congress. The student wing of the TamilNadu Congress branded him as an individual, who had been disloyal to his country. At the same time, many Congressmen felt that leaders like Asaf Ali and P. Varadarajalu Naidu needed to be deputed by the High Command to initiate a dialogue with the loyal followers of the Congress. For more details, see File No. 17/1945, 19/1945, AICC Papers, NMML, New Delhi; L/PJ/5/208, Public and Judicial Depart, OIOC, British Library, London.

³² File No. 23/1945, AICC Papers, containing a paper clipping of a news item published in the *Indian Express*, 22 December, 1945.

the Scheduled Classes Welfare League and the Adi-Dravida Samooha Scheduled Classes Sangham passed resolutions supporting the Harijan upliftment programmes of the Rajagopalachari Ministry. The President of the Scheduled Classes Welfare League, Pandit M.A. Selvanathan, said that the Congress had gained credibility among the scheduled castes, solely due to the efforts of Rajagopalachari, in a memorandum sent to the Congress High Command. The pro-Rajagopalachari scheduled caste leaders said to the High Command that if Rajagopalachari was not entrusted with major policy-making decisions, they would withdraw from the Congress.³³

While the debate within the Congress continued over Rajagopalachari's entry into active politics, a booklet entitled, *Ambedkar Refuted*, was published by him questioning the separatist claims of Ambedkar. He argued that the scheduled caste population was dispersed throughout British India and any attempt to isolate them could hardly be successful. He also pointed that Ambedkar did not comprehend the intrinsic difficulties related to the removal of untouchability and unjustifiably criticized the efforts of Gandhi. Rajagopalachari also alleged that Ambedkar represented the vested interests of the educated members of the scheduled castes and for this sole purpose he had adopted a separatist line.³⁴

Subsequently, the selection of Adi-Dravida candidates for the provincial elections acquired importance in the discussions of the Parliamentary Board of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. K. Kamraj Nadar, the President of the Tamil

³³ File No. 31/1945, AICC Papers, NMML, New Delhi.

³⁴ *The Hindu*, 22 January, 1946. For more details, see Chakravarthy Rajagopalachari, *Ambedkar Refuted*, Bombay, 1946, p. 5 and pp. 33-34.

Nadu Congress Committee formed different regional sub-committees to ensure the proper selection of candidates.³⁵ Mahatma Gandhi tour of Madras towards the end of January 1946, added a momentum to the Congress efforts to bring the scheduled castes under its fold. Gandhi, during this tour, displayed a far more liberal attitude towards issue of untouchability. He stressed that inter-caste dining and inter-marriage would lead to the removal of all sorts of social segregation and pave the way for the establishment of *Ramrajya* in the country.³⁶

Inspired by Gandhi's Madras tour, the Congress leaders of Madras put an effort to include pro-Congress scheduled caste leaders in public campaigns and highlighted the policies of the Rajagopalachari Government to uplift the scheduled castes. Campaigns were carried out against the AISC's separatist line by the pro-Congress scheduled caste leaders.³⁷ Congress tried to gain a distinct advantage over MSCF by involving nationalist Adi-Dravida leaders who supported its policies. Congress' quick and smooth listing of candidates for the reserved constituencies gave them an advantage over their rivals in the electoral battle. The cancellation of nomination of some candidates of MSCF due to technical reasons became a huge advantage to the Congress.³⁸

³⁵*The Hindu*, 23 January, 1946.

³⁶*The Hindu*, 27 January, 1946.

³⁷V.I. Muniswami Pillai expressed the opinion that Gandhi's ideas about inter-dining and temple entry could only bring about social equality. He also argued that Gandhi's call for change of heart on the part of the caste Hindus would prepare the ground for the social upliftment of the scheduled castes. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 27 January, 1946.

³⁸In most cases, nomination filed by 'scheduled caste' Congressmen were found to be valid by the District Collectors. On the other hand, nomination papers filed by prominent AISC candidates, including those of H.M. Jagannathan, A. Ratnam, E.K. Manavalan and S. Dayashankar were rejected on technical grounds. The Communist Party of India also lagged behind Congress in putting up candidates for the reserved seats. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 1 February, 1946.

Meanwhile, the leaders of the MSCF launched all-out attacks versus the Congress. The leaders of the Federation sent memorandums to the British officials to have separate electorates for them. Prominent leaders of the Federation, namely N. Sivaraj and Dr. A. Krishnaswami, reiterated that separate electorates alone could vouch for the election of the real representatives of the scheduled castes. They said that the colonial authorities needed to initiate dialogues with all the sections of the Indian society instead of initiating a discussion with the Congress over the governance of future India. They also agreed to Ambedkar's proposals with regard to the fixation of minimum wages in agriculture and industry.³⁹

However, approaching elections, the Tamil Nadu Congress introduced certain changes in policies to increase its acceptability in the electorate. The district and local level committees were thoroughly reorganized by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. The grass-root level Congressmen were joined by provincial leaders to carry out campaigns in support of the Adi-Dravida candidates. In certain districts, local level Congressmen allied with leaders of Christian community to ensure the election of their candidates in the reserved seats.⁴⁰ When election results came in March 1946, the Congress had a facile win over its opponents. The performance of Congress was especially impressive in the reserved constituencies. In Madras Legislature, all the thirty seats reserved for the

³⁹Apart from supporting Ambedkar's bill on the introduction of minimum wage boards for all industries, separatist scheduled caste leaders in Madras favored the introduction of compulsory secondary education and establishment of industrial workshops, for the benefit of the poorer classes of the society. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 6 February, 1946.

⁴⁰In Chingleput, Christian leaders like Rev. U.M. Jesudasan, G.V. Job and Lawrence Samuel actively campaigned in support of the Congress candidates. The grass-root level Congress workers, with the support of the Christian leaders organized public meetings in Madurantakam and Tirukkalikundram to secure the victories of the scheduled caste candidates. See *The Hindu*, 17 March, 1946.

scheduled castes recorded victories of the Congress. The MSCF candidates lost their deposits.⁴¹

The election results revealed various interesting issues. The considerably weak organizational structure of the separatist scheduled castes leaders could be seen to be responsible for their failure to fetch votes of the scheduled caste voters having an apathy for the Congress. Moreover, the failure of the Scheduled Caste Federation to have an alliance with grassroots level organizations including communist organizations proved to be futile. The massive consolidation of caste Hindu votes ended up being a deciding factor in the elections.

The election results badly affected the political interests of the AISC. The Federation's poor performance across the country led to them losing their political clout as well as weakening their strength of bargaining with the Government. The Viceroy, however, chose Ambedkar to be the representative of the scheduled castes before the British Cabinet Mission when they visited India in March, 1946. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State considered AISC to be the actual representative body of the scheduled castes than any other organization.⁴² Also, considering the prominent victory of the Congress, the Viceroy invited Jagjivan Ram, Bhai Prithvi Singh Azad and Radhanath Das, three nationalist scheduled caste leaders who belong to the Congress affiliated All India Depressed Classes League.

⁴¹*The Hindu*, 30 March, 1946.

⁴² A.C. Pradhan, *The Emergence of the Depressed Classes*, Bookland International, Bhubaneswar, 1986, p. 298.

As the British Cabinet Mission had its dialogue with the scheduled caste leaders across the political spectrum, the All India Depressed Classes League initiated a major movement in Madras. The popular scheduled caste leaders who got elected from Congress to the Madras Assembly opined that the only the Congress could uplift the Adi-Dravidas. An argument was put forward by the leaders that Adi-Dravidas had received proportional representation in the Government services during Rajagopalachari's tenure as the Premier of Madras.⁴³

The Adi-Dravida leaders of Congress also criticized the AISC's plan to have a national level satyagraha against the British Cabinet Mission's supposed wrong doings. The Madras faction of the All India Depressed Classes League stated that such a campaign only showed the defeatist attitude of the AISC. They staunchly argued that the political aspirations of the scheduled castes were inherently linked to that of the caste Hindus. Any attempt to slide them away from Hinduism was expected to create new political problems.⁴⁴

Though the AISC decided to go ahead with the plan of satyagraha, it did not affect the public life in Madras. They could not mobilize the scheduled castes in Madras or elsewhere in India and the satyagraha ended up being a failure. In spite of the satyagraha's failure, they aligned with the Provincial Dravidian Federation to keep up their anti-Congress stand.⁴⁵ The AISC faced a huge dilemma in Madras unlike anywhere else in India. Their proclaimed position against Congress

⁴³J. Shivashanmugam Pillai, a prominent scheduled caste Congress legislator carried out a strong campaign in favour of the Congress Harijan Programme in several Tamil-speaking districts of the Madras Presidency. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 6 June, 1946.

⁴⁴*The Hindu*, 12 July, 1946.

⁴⁵*The Hindu*, 27 August, 1947.

prevented them from having any alliance with Congress, while political compulsions made them support EVR's demand for a separate Dravida Nadu.⁴⁶

The anti-Congress position of the AISCFF forced the certain politicians of the Federation to have a secret political understanding with the Dravida Kazhagam. From 1947, there were major developments in the scheduled caste politics of Madras. While the Provincial Depressed Class League, having close affiliation with the Congress became more popular among the masses than MSCF, involvement of the communists in the peasant-worker movements got them closer to the scheduled castes. Soon after, the autonomy of scheduled caste politics waned, giving way to the politics of untouchability incorporating the ideologically different politics of nationalism and class struggle.

Independence and its Aftermath

In the regions of Madras and Travancore-Cochin states that spoke Tamil, the post-independence scenario presented a polity in a state of constant flux. The continuous and constant realignment of forces that affected the Adi-Dravidas and other Scheduled Caste communities in the region thus presented the Adi-Dravida movement a new set of challenges to deal with. Thus, from 1947 up until the State Reorganization Bill was passed, the situation thus fluctuated rapidly.

Under Rajagopalachari and then Kamraj, the Congress Party dominated over the marginalized populace owing to the traction that the Gandhian ideal of Harijan

⁴⁶In May 1946, EVR in the Black Shirts Conference organized by the Dravida Federation stressed on social equality. At the same time, it was argued, that the participation of the depressed classes in the movement for a separate Dravidisthan could ensure for them the benefits of a true Swaraj. For more details, see *The Hindu*, 3 September, 1946.

emancipation had among the masses, despite the emergence of the Schedule Caste Federation under Ambedkar. That said, based on the Congress' inability to offer much in terms of progress and reform for the downtrodden, the MSCF developed a critique. The end of colonialism marked a simultaneous change in the CPI's strategy which now took on an even more confrontational attitude against the landlords' dominance in the countryside. It is thus that the Schedule Caste small peasantry and agrarian proletariat were mobilised by way of the Kisan Sabha agitations that were pitted against the landed interests represented by the state machinery. The quest for a potentially independent Dravida Nadu that was rid of the yoke of Brahmin and North Indian domination also ensured that the Dravidian parties were active; Adi Dravida leaders and communities were attracted thus by the rationalist and egalitarian rhetoric espoused by the DK and later the DMK.

Political formations that could consolidate a wide spectrum of the Schedule Caste community support around them were not readily countered or engaged with by the AISC due to its inability to devise an ideological and political program that was coherent.⁴⁷ It is the Congress that benefited from this, due to its hold on power, patronize a large section of the Dalit community. There was however an attempt to build alliances - with the Dravidian parties and with the communists who, in and around Tanjavur, were leading a militant peasant movement. The MSCF, despite having entered into electoral alliances with both the DMK and with the communists at multiple instances, concluded by the end of the period in

⁴⁷ Sekhar Bandhopadhyay, "Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945-47". *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34 Nov. 4 2000, pp. 941-942.

discussion that the sole option to advance Dalit Politics in the region was the Republican Party of India that was newly formed.

It is to be noted that the fate of the communists in the State of Madras in this regard was interlinked with the initial phase in the course of development of the Adi Dravida movement. Militant insurrectionary activities were organized by the communists in both urban and rural areas concurrently with the increasing influence of the hard line of BT Randive post the 1948 Calcutta Congress and with their struggles in Telangana. Notably, the disturbances produced thus as a result of the Communist agitation were not easily quelled by the Congress in the state, given that it was organizationally weak owing to the fact that it was faction-ridden.

The spree of agitations in the mills and textile factories by the communist trade unions were met initially with an overwhelming response. For instance, despite potential repercussions the workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic mills who declared open support to the CPI organized demonstrations at government ministries supporting the communist propaganda that the Congress ministry was pro-Capitalists and anti-people. The ministry soon decided to quell the agitations by using the might of the security forces. In towns such as Madurai and Coimbatore clashes broke out between the communists on one hand and the police and trade unions that supported that Congress on the other. These clashes saw the Adi Dravida workers becoming the focal point since, in an attempt to bring them

into the fold, the communists started highlighting their socio-economic oppression.⁴⁸

Having been at the receiving end of feudal domination for centuries, there was great traction among the lower caste agrarian proletariat of the agrarian struggles by the communists. Adi Dravidas were organized en masse in various regions of Thanjore district such as Nannilam, Kumbakonam, and Mayavaram by the Kisan Sabha demanding permanent occupancy rights and submitted memorandums on peasant demands to the Congress ministries. It appeared thus that there was a serious challenge to the hold in rural areas of the Congress since a whole mass of Dalits were brought into the communist fold due to their struggles in Thanjore. Owing to the fact that the rice production in Thanjore which was the rice-bowl of the region was completely monopolised by the landlords, peasant angst in this regard put the peasantry in direct conflict necessarily with the party that still catered to and represented largely landlord interests.⁴⁹

Rather than choosing to consider the demands of the peasantry, rural unrest and communist influence was sought to be countered by the Congress by using the Police. This however to an intensification in the unrest, resulting in violent conflicts between the peasantry and the *mirasidars*. Police atrocities that particularly targeted women, merely because the Adi Dravidas chose to voice their

⁴⁸ The communist strategy was twofold; to bring the Scheduled Caste workers in mills and factories into the trade union movement on a class struggle line, and organize peasant struggles. The latter progressively became quite important when the communists involved themselves in disputes of agrarian laborers and tenants with the powerful landlords. For instance in April, 1947 when they mobilized peasantry in the region to argue against the exploitative *mirasidars* who would not pay adequate wages. See *Fortnightly Report for the First Half of April 1947 (confidential)* TNA.

⁴⁹ Saraswati Menon "Response to Class and Caste Conflicts in Thanjavur District 1940-1952" Part-I, *Social Scientist*, Vol. VII, No. 7, 1979, pp. 66-67.

demands particularly enraged them, leading to an alarming prospect for the Congress wherein it started losing its hold over the populace. The Congress thus attempted to deal with this situation by trying to bolster in the villages its own peasant fronts - a noted Congressman from Thanjore city, G. Narayanaswamy Naidu was tasked with the above responsibility but to no avail. This had a simple explanation - it was in the upper and intermediary caste groups apart from the landed gentry that the Congress had its base and not the lower caste peasantry, who strictly stayed put with the communists.

The communist resulted in some gains for the oppressed peasantry - they witnessed a doubling of wages and a reduction in rents through the bloody confrontations in East Thanjore that drove out the landlords from their properties.⁵⁰ Traditional forms of tenancy that were based on the *Panai* and the *Varam* system were challenged by the agitations of January 1948, resulting in the strengthening of the communist organization.⁵¹ The mobilization campaigns of the communists benefited to a significant extent due to their connections with local lower caste associations.

The leadership of the Congress favoured punitive action. Leaders who had an interest in land such as T. Prakasam called for stringent action in an attempt to put an end to the communist menace.⁵² It is thus that the security powers of the state

⁵⁰ Joseph Tharamangalam "The Communist Movement and the Theory and Practice of Peasant Mobilization in South India" *The Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. II, No. 4, 1981, pp. 491-492.

⁵¹ There was essentially little difference between the *panai* and the *varam* system except for the fact that the former had to bear the entire costs of a bad year in terms of cultivation. See Marshall M Bouton *Agrarian Radicalism in South India*, New Jersey, 1985, pp. 185-91.

⁵² Sraswati Menon, "Responses to Class," p. 62.

were subsequently strengthened through acts and ordinances such as the Public Safety Act (1948) and the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (1947). This was an aspect of the overall response from the central government that sought to counter the communists' insurrectionary tendencies between 1948 and 1950. Communist leaders were frequently detained and imprisoned under Sections 147 and 148 of the Indian Penal Code in an attempt to discipline them. However, challenges to this policy of punitive action were challenged by Communist MLAs such as Pillamari Venkatawaralu within the confines of the state assembly who argued that it was in fact the Congress and not the communists which instigated violence. Statements by leaders like Patel who had in the course of addressing meetings argued for a policy of sword for sword were cited by them.⁵³

It is necessary for us to turn next to the curious coincidence that led to an increase in the traction of the communists among the Adi Dravidas. There was a mobilization of the anti-North Indian sentiment due to the language policy of the Congress government and the resultant increase in popularity enjoyed by anti-Hindi agitations. Such campaigns by the EV Ramaswamy led Dravidar Kazhgam saw narratives against Brahmanism playing crucial role. Anti-Congress rhetoric on the basis of the Nehru administration's pro-Hindi policies was supplanted on the material reality that was class exploitation. It is to this great churn in the politics of the Madras State and necessarily its implications for the Adi Dravida communities that were considering the myriad ways in which they could emancipate themselves from the yoke of serfdom that we now turn.

⁵³ For Pillamari Venkatawaralu's statement in this regard, see *MLAD*, Vol. III, 1947, p. 463.

EVR's Justice Party had until 1947 for the better part of its existence propagated an ideology of a separate statehood for the Dravidian populace. The post-independence era saw a re-assertion of its politics in the form of various propaganda that targeted the Congress state government such as the anti-Hindi agitations that drew huge swathes of students to the DK fold. The political temperature, so to say, rose with the specter of a Hindi-imposing Congress that was undermining Tamil culture and traditions. The Congress government had to deal with not only pamphleteering but also militant protests and picketing in front of schools that had come around to the idea of teaching Hindi as a part of the curriculum. The wide-ranging acceptability of the agitations led by the DK in the society saw other political formations - for instance the CPI which organized joint fund-raising campaigns with the DK against the imposition of Hindi in the State - lending their weight behind the movement.⁵⁴ The Governor General of India - Rajagopalachari, the prominent Congressman from the state, was met with stone pelting and black flags on his visit to the state.

Although the government tried punitive measures to limit the activities of the DK activists, its strong-arm tactics did not yield benefits. Despite there being confusion to an extent within DK ranks when the government went ahead with the operation to unseat the Nizam of Hyderabad, they were soon invigorated. Tempers flared when an outsider - the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, was appointed by the Congress as the governor of the province of Madras. In the by-elections to the state, although the ruling dispensation held on to the constituencies, the majorities of Congress candidates saw significant erosion.

⁵⁴*Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of August 1948 (Confidential)* TNA.

EVR and the DK realized that the reason for this erosion in the support base of the Congress and the concomitant swelling in the ranks of their supporters was due to the lower caste masses and the working class.⁵⁵ The DK thus redoubled consequently its efforts to consolidate and secure Scheduled Caste support which saw EVR, in an attempt to emphasise the point that only an independent Dravida Nadu could ensure the emancipation of the lower castes from centuries of bondage and servitude, increasing his anti-Brahmanical pitch. This also saw a critique of the entire conception of the Indian nation and the calling out the Congress party for clinging on to Hindu ideals that were patently conservative. This resulted in some gains for the DK when in the District Board elections that were held soon after, its Scheduled Caste candidates trounced incumbents from the Congress.⁵⁶

However, when one of the premier mass leaders of the Kazhgam movement - Annadurai, parted ways with the DK to create the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the situation was turned on its head since the two parties in catering to the same constituency now became embroiled in a competitive fervour.⁵⁷ The DMK through its pamphlets that were strong on anti-Aryan rhetoric raised the pitch for an independent Dravida homeland; its rising popularity left the DK and EVR with the sole option of realigning with the communists.

⁵⁵ The support for the DK among the working classes was evidenced by their growing participation in demonstrations. So profuse was the level of support that members of the party wrote pledges in blood to strive for an independent Dravida Nadu and never let Hindi be imposed. See *Fortnightly Report for the first half of September 1948 (Confidential)* TNA; *Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of September 1948 (Confidential)* TNA.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ G.O. No. 3600, Home Department, Dated September 6, 1948.

Conclusion

Since the advent of constitutional reforms and limited level of representation granted to the Indian people, the Adi Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, much like the scheduled castes and indeed other communities around the country had to contend with the competitive environment of sectional interest groups bargaining for a better position. The Congress which was at the centre of the mass movements against the colonial regime was nevertheless challenged on its claim of being an umbrella organization catering to all sections of the society. The Adi-Dravida movement emerged from its cultural awakening and theoretical development, into the era of electoral politics, out to challenge that very claim. It was also trying to find its feet within the context of a rival ethno-nationalistic formation in the form of the Dravidian movement represented by the Justice Party and EVR and his Self Respect Movement.

For years, the Congress under Gandhi had been advocating their version of an emancipation program for what was known as the untouchable community on account of its lowly status in the orthodox Hindu social order. However, a substantial body of influence and opinion mobilization within the Congress came from the elites within this very social order. The upper caste and particularly the landed interests which had a direct conflict of interest with the Adi-Dravidas who were mostly landless laborers and worked under the former in a system of quasi bonded condition, were reticent about any radical change. The Congress was thus trying to temper the rate of reform and looking to ride in all boats at the same time by pitching its patriotic appeal to the people. The rise of the subaltern consciousness within the depressed classes all over the country meanwhile had

created an atmosphere of confrontation as Dr. Ambedkar was determined to get as much reform for the community as possible.

The organizations operating in the former Madras Presidency like the Madras Scheduled Caste Association and the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha under their leaders M.C. Rajah, B. Sivaraj and R. Srinivasan followed the line of trying to gain the maximum. Temple entry was one among many issues which polarized opinion in the society and the upper castes saw it as an erosion of their authority through the violation of the sacred texts. The Congress and its reluctant attitude under their leader C Rajagopalachari was challenged not just by the Adi-Dravidas but the leaders of the Self Respect Movement and the Justice Party. The Dravidian ideology was primarily based upon a non-Brahmin ethno-cultural assertion for the Tamils but which had its own internal conflicts with the scheduled castes. EVR however combined this nationalist appeal with the radical anti-clerical enlightenment ideals which offered an encouraging package to the Adi-Dravidas.

As reform within the upper castes, the need for the Congress to reach out and quell separatist sentiment within the scheduled castes and most importantly the ideological political pressure put by the subaltern movement created a condition where some amount of progress was made regarding the political progress of the community. The British, moved by the twin motives of playing the benevolent and righteous arbiter plus the desire to weaken the Congress standing among the masses tried to placate the demands of the Adi-Dravidas. The latter reciprocated by supporting largely the government and its program throughout the 1920s, 30s and the starting of the Second World War. The pace of reform was obviously not so rapid as one would think considering that Gandhi still exercised a huge

influence among all castes and creeds and there were leaders within the *Harijan* community- his preferred term for the scheduled castes, who backed the Congress line. Thus these combination of factors brought about the Poona Pact wherein the depressed classes got internal reservations within a joint electorate but could not achieve a separate one, which could have placed them legally out of the ambit of the Hindu social order.

Post independence era in Tamil Nadu much like everywhere else in the country brought new avenues for accommodation but also social conflict on a much larger scale. The terrain of the latter became the countryside where the newly emergent and militant Communists started organizing the subjugated peasantry and landless laborers from the untouchable communities. It was the economic power that the upper caste landed elite had over the Adi-Dravidas which had been the base for the superstructure of caste oppression and hence the dawn of constitutional democracy drafted by a member of the former untouchable community offered them hope and an avenue to struggle. The battleground was the Kaveri delta in Tamil Nadu, particularly the rice producing Thanjavur district where land ownership patterns had been skewed. Continuing bureaucratic collusion with the landlords and relative state apathy meant that the 1950s saw an upswing in militancy and dispute over wages.

Hence class struggle was intertwined with the issue of caste oppression as the Adi-Dravidas tried to mobilize themselves in the countryside. Politically, the All India Scheduled Caste Federation established by Ambedkar could not make much headway. Once Rajagopalachari and his popularity began to wane, the Congress projected K Kamraj, a non-Brahmin backward caste leader who was seen as more

acceptable in terms of furthering the cause of inclusivity on social terms. The Dravidars Kzhagam founded by EVR had broken up and the Dravidar Munnetra Kazhagam or the DMK emerged with a shrill and secretive cultural overtone. The DMK and its politics against the Congress provided another conundrum which the Adi-Dravidas had to contend with.

All in all, the period from the 1920's which was the era of political awakening for the untouchables, to the 1950, the Adi-Dravida movement encountered a lot of other sectional interest politics through which it had to negotiate its path. The reform that was achieved was obviously limited and the relations in the countryside in particular were still reminiscent of the feudal ages. Hence in the independence period, and as the militancy of the 60's faced them, struggles for dignity, right and evolution of their political consciousness still stood as challenges in front of the community.

Chapter V

Post-Independent Tamil Nadu and the Adi-Dravida Movement (1950-1970)

The realignment of the political forces in Tamil Nadu in the late 1940's reflected in the denunciation by the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) of the manner in which communist activities in the state were dealt with by the government. This resulted in the crossing over to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a section of the DK's Scheduled Caste base that was disengaged from the communists. To an extent, this was also caused due to Annadurai's persona as a charismatic leader. His fiery speeches that were strongly anti-Brahmanical in their rhetoric resulted in him gaining a number of new followers from among disadvantaged groups and influenced many to switch over from the DK. DMK's journal *Nama Nadu* acquired a content that was progressively extreme in character, with one of its issues calling for the rise of all other castes against the Brahmins.¹ While the Communist Party of India (CPI) maintained its difference with the Dravidian parties on the issue of separate statehood, it continued to ally with them in the campaign against caste oppression.

The Dravidian parties were stuck in a quandary with Kamraj² becoming the chief minister of the State of Madras. His government's introduction of the elementary education scheme blunted the opposition from the DK and the DMK, whose ambivalence towards the new ministry was visible in their approach. Whereas

¹ Lloyd L Rudolph "Urban Life and Populist Radicalism". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vo. XX, No. 3, 1961, pp. 286-291.

² Kamraj Nadar was the state president of the TamilNadu Congress committee. He belonged to an ex-unseeable community and he became the first non-brahmin Chief Minister of the state.

Annadurai was supportive, albeit grudgingly and cautiously, emerging young leaders such as Karunanidhi disagreed seeing the prospect of Dravidian politics gaining mass traction. Electorally, independent India did not see Schedule Caste identity formations making any headway.

Under Ambedkar, the All India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) suffered numerous reversals owing to which he was forced to soften his anti-Congress stance. However, he soon came into conflict with conservative Hindu leaders such as Patel and Govind Vallabh Pant in the Congress, as the head of the Constituent Assembly.³ This consequently led to provincial organizations of the Schedule Castes Federation becoming increasingly critical of the Congress ministries in their respective states. It is thus that the Gandhian legacy of patronizing Dalits failed to find any takers in the Madras Scheduled Castes Federation (hereafter referred as MSCF) when the Congress government under Kamraj initiated a number of programs of moderate reform, leading to an increased skepticism within the MSCF regarding the Congress' intentions of uplifting the Harijans.

Congress policies towards the Adi-Dravida

From 1946, the Congress initiated social reforms in the state. Acknowledging the problem of untouchability, the Government passed legislations against untouchability and caste discrimination through the Madras Removal of Civil Disabilities Act which allowed trial for crimes such as disallowing entry of Dalits into temples.⁴ The Madras Temple Entry Act of 1947 was seen to be another

³ Sekhar Bandhopadhyay "Transfer of Power" pp. 956.

⁴ *Madras Administrative Report, 1947*. Part I, Madras, 1948, pp. 5.

attempt at bringing about equity in social relations. Through superficial changes such as these, they found support from the upper caste intelligentsia as well.⁵ Such measures of social reform were followed by more serious economic issues. The Government instructed the Labour department to look at the different economic issues that affect the Harijans and suggest measures to uplift them from shackles of perpetual poverty. However, the whole exercise ended up being farcical since only the then existing Government schemes were implemented in this regard.

The Government made deliberate efforts to meet the educational and employment demands of the scheduled castes. Schools were opened in regions with dire need with free mid-day meal scheme introduced to ensure attendance of children. Charitable organizations and schools working for the benefit of students from scheduled castes were given grants while the Government gave scholarships to all those students who were in the secondary school.⁶ Understanding the need for providing opportunities for higher education to the scheduled castes, grants were given to Universities of Madras, Andhra and Annamalai, to grant free tuition to students from deprived backgrounds.⁷ In matters relating to employment, the Government relaxed rules for the scheduled castes in order to make it easier to qualify for Government employment through Public Service Commission. Clerical jobs could be now applied for with a minimum of 35% marks in the senior certificate school exams. New provisions were made to take in scheduled castes

⁵ *ibid.* p. 89.

⁶ *Madras Administrative Report, 1947.* Madras, 1948, p. 185.

⁷ G.O. No. 1962, Education and Public Health Department. Dated 9 August 1948; TNA.

for the Madras Veterinary Services and Madras Cooperative Subordinate Services.⁸

In order to provide social security, cooperative societies that were set up for the benefit of Harijans were strongly encouraged and supported by the Government. The Government proposed plans to build housing for Harijans through cooperative schemes with the Registrar General of Cooperative Societies taking the lead.⁹ Economic activities such as weaving and spinning were actively promoted as Gandhian activities of self-reliance. Funds were invested to improve supply of water in rural areas and access to loans for the community was made easier for the purposes of employment and other necessities.¹⁰

In March 1949, the Government proclaimed the thirtieth day of each month as Harijan Day considering it as a tool for social reform, with celebrations across the state with the bureaucracy as well as the Congress affiliated organization joining it.¹¹ The leaders of Congress took part actively in these campaigns and petitioned the Government specifically on such occasions to do more for the welfare of Harijans. Leaders like D. D. V. B. Iyenger requested the President of India to grant funds for the empowerment of Harijans from the Gandhi Memorial Fund.¹² The Government on the other hand saw this as an opportunity to announce various

⁸ G.O. No. 974, Public Services Department. Dated 29 April 1948, TNA.

⁹ It was decided under this scheme to earmark places where at a time up to thirty houses in a colony style arrangement could be built for the Harijans. See *Madras Information*, Vol. II, No. 1, January 15 1948, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Madras Administrative Report, 1947*, pp. 20-21 and p. 84.

¹¹ The stated aim of this exercise was to make the people aware of government efforts. *The Hindu*, 17 March 1949.

¹² *The Hindu*, 30 April 1949.

programs and schemes for the empowerment of the marginalized such as setting up of cooperatives and housing schemes.

The programs, however, had critics within the Congress party. The scheduled caste leaders of the Congress strongly opined that the programs had failed to meet its objectives of providing relief to the scheduled castes substantially. Many were of the view that the party had to deal with the staunch upper caste resistance to reform strongly.¹³ A major critique that stemmed from the scheduled caste leadership within the Congress was the lack of uniformity in the distribution of land and the lackadaisical approach in breaking the monopoly of the landed class in order to economically emancipate the Harijans. Swami Sahjanandam, a prominent Harijan leader, raised the issue of tenant eviction by landlords occurring on a vast scale with the support of the state in misusing the IPC and pushing the peasantry into more misery and hardship.¹⁴

The government also faced multiple criticisms for its failure to utilize the fund of ten million rupees earmarked for Harijan development and for the ineffective implementation of the Temple Entry Act and the Social Disability Act and for the alleged cancellation of pro-Dalit schemes in education started by Rajagopalachari before independence.¹⁵ S. Nagappa, a Harijan MLA, also pointed out that the atrocities and social ostracizing orchestrated by caste Hindus on Harijans could

¹³Congress legislators such as BS Murthy and VL Munniswami Pillai criticized the government for not doing enough to alleviate the conditions of the Harijans and lacking direction. *MLAD*, 1949, Vol. XVIII, pp. 69.

¹⁴*MLAD*, Vol. X, 1948, pp. 397-398 and Vol. XIX, 1949, pp. 413-417.

¹⁵For instance it was pointed out that the government failed to get Dalit students admitted to polytechnic and intermediate levels. *MLAD*, Vol. XX, 1949, p. 746.

only be checked if there was inter-mixture of castes such as community meals on a regular basis.¹⁶

The government attempted to rebut these allegations and assuage the concerns of Scheduled Castes (SC) leadership that the government's efforts were insufficient. They highlighted the fact that Sivashanmugham Pillai, a young scheduled caste leader, had been nominated for the post of the speaker of the Madras state legislative assembly during the tenure as chief minister of Prakasam. The charge of no expenditure on Harijan welfare funds was also refuted by a cabinet minister.¹⁷

It was realized by the Congress leadership that such criticism might impact it electorally if its Scheduled Caste base bought the narrative of government failure. There were budgetary changes made to the welfare fund for Harijans and in certain districts such as South Arcot, Chingelpet and Trichinopoly, funds for the labour schools were increased.¹⁸ It was also necessary to dispel the notion that the government had aligned itself with the landed interests. Towards this, circulars were issued to put a stop to evictions and there was particular stress on the necessity for Harijan peasantry to acquire pattas for the lands they tilled and had established their dwellings upon.¹⁹ In spite of this, the policies of the state government however were criticized without respite. The allocation of wet land which had to be filled before any construction was possible, for the residential use

¹⁶*MLAD*, Vol. XX, p. 747.

¹⁷ Figures were cited for the same; 3530000 for 1947-48 and 4138000 for 1948-49. *Ibid.* p.751.

¹⁸ G.O. No. 470, Firka Development, dated 17 May 1949. TNA.

¹⁹ G.O. No. 380, Firka Development, dated 6 April 1949, TNA.

of the Harijans was strongly criticized.²⁰ The government was also requested to invest in housing for the Harijans.²¹

There was further criticism of the government for its arrogant attitude towards the poor peasants. The peasants in Tanjore were branded as communist sympathizers. The landlords prevented them from cultivation and on top of this, the Kumaraswamy Raja ministry enacted police excesses upon them for which it received criticism. The focal point of critique of the greater part of SC legislators was that the Congress showed little interest even in following the Gandhian ideals it had set for itself and that unless rectification measures were taken for the benefit of the Harijans, the Congress could not hope to portray itself as the representative of their aspirations. The Congress was also warned of total loss of support in the time of inaction, within the Harijan community.²² The criticism came from both the scheduled castes and also from the upper caste members. The upper caste members warned that the schemes marked for the SC community were not having the desired effect. They suggested various changes to policy. It was proposed that to enable the intermingling of students coming from different castes, the schools should be a nodal focus of annihilating caste. Minimum wages for SC labourers was also mentioned. It was put forth that if these measures were not included the program as a whole would be rendered ineffective.²³

²⁰*MLAD*, Vol. IV, 1952, pp. 60-63.

²¹ The point was forcefully argued by Swami Sahjanandam who said that the lower castes had minimal financial resources on account of their agrarian proletariat status and hence provisions for housing were required in earnest. *Ibid.*

²²*MLAD*, Vol. IV, PP. 73-75.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 125-128.

The criticism was not unfounded also. The apathetic and extremely hostile nature of the state was clearly visible in the discussions on the floor of the state assembly with regard to social justice. The government failed to hold the bureaucracy responsible for these failures which were cited as the major reason for the failure of the ideals of Social Justice.²⁴ The Congress viewed a propaganda blitzkrieg as a tunnel out of these criticisms. The prominent Scheduled Caste leader Sivashanmugham Pillai, who was the speaker of the assembly, was taken on board for Congress campaign and to describe the benefits of government policy to the community. Pillai was both an accomplished mass leader and a trusted ally of Rajagopalachari. He used the platform to put in a good word for the achievements of the state government. He also vouched for Rajagopalachari's sincerity with regard to handling issues of Scheduled Castes.²⁵

Even Women Congress leaders were taken on board to campaign for government policy stating that prohibition was beneficial to the Harijans further reiterating that Rajagopalachari was quite a sincere leader in matters related to their upliftment.²⁶ However, all these strategies failed in answering the criticism of SC legislators in the assembly, despite their political ideology. The administrative excesses and faulty land distribution of Rajagopalachari were particularly mentioned along with the desperate need for the Congress to do something about the still continuing Mirasidari domination in the villages.

²⁴*MLAD*, Vol. IV, 1952 pp. 153-158.

²⁵*The Hindu*, 2 February 1953.

²⁶*The Hindu*, 17 December 1953.

It was at this juncture that Kamraj Nadar took up the leadership of the state. Kamraj was viewed to take an extensive interest in finding solutions to these matters. He attended several Adi-Dravida conferences and mentioned the need for a social change. He also demanded the upper castes people let go of their superiority complex and work with all communities for the upliftment of the society. He further pointed out the need of the cooperative movement in alleviating deprivation and poverty of the rural Dalit people.²⁷ A few administrative advances were also taken up by the Kamraj ministry to aid to the delivery of amenities to Scheduled Castes. A board of bureaucrats including deputy tahsildars were introduced by the government to aid smooth implementation of its schemes. The board of revenue was also approached to find ways of distributing land to the community in a short period of time.²⁸ In Madras the government also took certain steps to direct efforts at providing clean drinking water, sanitation and other facilities to the community. Efforts were taken regarding housing, vocational training and land acquisition.

On one hand the DK and the DMK were rendered neutral to an extent with the appointment of the Kamraj, while on the other hand the Madras Scheduled Castes Federation (MSCF) continued to denounce the Congress administration. As such, being critical of the policies of the state government that brought minimal positive impact to the Scheduled Castes, the MSCF resented and questioned the Congress for patronizing the Dalits. Among the reasons cited for the failure of the ministry were insincerity and narrowness in the scope of programs; consequently, with

²⁷*The Hindu*, 3 June 1953.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

respect to alliances, this meant that the MSCF now had to explore other options. The Federation started to raise the demand for separate electorates to have more influence on policy decisions.²⁹

The DMK politics in the state

The Congress commanded the last two elections in Tamil Nadu during the colonial period to a great extent as a result of the low degree of activation and the electorate was confined to just fifteen per cent of the adult populace based on the property and literacy criteria. Despite this, the Dravidianist development was fast after decolonization in light of the fact that the DMK, framed in 1949, received a technique proper to the post-colonial political order. The DMK's incorporation of the non-Brahmanism and Tamil nationalism within a populist discourse moved on the focal point of the Dravidianist critique from Brahmin dominance to bureaucratic clientelism. Tamil Nadu was the first Indian state in which secessionist/autonomist impulses developed despite initial enthusiasm about the creation of the Indian union.³⁰ Nehru could only respond with perplexity and anger to Dravidianist mytho-history, which he decried as 'nonsense', provoking one of the DMK's major early agitations.³¹

²⁹ *Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of May 1954 (Confidential)* TNA.

³⁰ While secessionist demands were also raised from the 1940s onwards in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland, even the initial attitude towards nation formation was ambiguous in these border states. The National Conference, the dominant party in Kashmir in the 1940s, accepted accession to the Indian union as preferable to integration in Pakistan. A separate Kashmir seemed the preferred option to party leaders, but they lacked the military capability and international support to achieve this end. A separatist movement began in 1946 in Nagaland.

³¹ The deep differences between Nehruvian and Dravidianist mytho-history are illustrated by their different interpretations of the Indus valley civilization. Contrast Nehru, Sessa Iyengar and Annadurai.

The Nehruvian model of development, after independence, was for the most part dependent on large public sector projects whose growth periods were long and the permeation of whose advantages to the transitional and lower strata regularly lay in the dubious future.³² Tamil Nadu's experience exemplified the pressures in this strategy as economic development profited just little segments of the intermediate and lower strata through the early post-colonial decades.³³ The politics saw shifting terrains in Tamil Nadu from the 1950s. The Congress was now the ruling party after independence, the Socialists had returned to the Congress fold and hence incapacitated and the CPI-led agrarian militancy began to subside even as the communists continued their agitational politics sans dividends for it. It was the DMK which started emerging as a party of street protests in the middle of the decade. It started mobilising, primarily, the non-Brahmin castes on major themes of its Dravidian nationalist plank which highlighted its growing stature. It launched the *mummunai porattam* (a three cornered agitation) which hove red around cultural distinctiveness of the Tamils.

The first theme of the agitation was the demand for renaming a station from Dalmiapuram to its original name of Kallakudi. The former name had been given on account of a prominent cement factory owned by a North Indian Marwari business house being located near the village. This plank expressed the DMK's espousal of regional assertion against perceived North Indian economic and

³² Frankel (1978), Singh (1974), Gopal (1984: 106-26; 1980: 291-319). The plan to alleviate poverty and generate employment by assigning wage goods production to labour intensive small-scale industries and forming agricultural cooperatives was barely implemented and failed.

³³ See MIDS (1998), Department of Statistics (1994), Kurien (1981), Vaidyanathan (1986) and Guhan (1981, 1983).

cultural domination. The second plank of the agitation was directed at the prime minister himself. Nehru had termed the demand for greater autonomy in educational and cultural sphere for the Tamils with greater importance laid to their history and culture as ‘nonsense’ which the DMK duly utilised for anti-Congress propaganda. Thirdly, the craft education scheme introduced by the government of Rajaji became a bone of contention as it was declared as bringing about a *kula kalvi thittam* (caste based education scheme) which emphasised the Brahmin domination of the Congress and its North Indian bias. The third plank proved to be particularly durable as it brought together a coalition of anti-Brahminical caste and political formations like the DK and led to the ouster of Rajagopalachari as Chief Minister.

The DMK also intermittently built agitations against the intention of the Indian government to make Hindi the official language of the nation state. The most notable were in 1950, 1952, 1959, 1960 and 1963. It not only criticised the government for trying to pass such a measure by 1965, but also lambasted the Official Languages Commission for merely restricting itself to the timeframe of introducing Hindi rather than allow those deposing before it to question the very premise of such a move. After the State Reorganization Commission (SRC) submitted its reports, boundaries began to be redrawn to conform to geo-linguistic spheres. The state of Tamil Nadu was formed after Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking areas from the Madras Presidency were transferred to the respective states while Tamil speaking areas were carved out of the former princely state of Travancore to join the new state. Between 1953 and 1958, the DMK and its fellow Tamil Nationalist organizations agitated for more areas to be

included in Tamil Nadu. However, the DMK tempered its position by excluding the inclusion of religiously important places like Tirupathi, even as it demanded areas with substantial Tamil population to be included in Tamil Nadu. Thus the bonds of language were strengthened along the border areas of the state and a common Tamil identity consolidated.

The party did not confine itself to cultural issues which were, nevertheless, its mainstay. Economic issues were taken up, for example, through the support of peasants agitation in Nagavaram, Tiruchi District, and their support for distressed handloom, *beedi* and transport workers. In 1962, the DMK led a strike on the issue of inflation which drew significant support. The DMK refrained from building mass organizations to mobilise workers of particular occupational strand - be it white collar or blue collar. Initiatives were independently taken up by a few party activists, following the example of the communists, to build localised unions in factories as happened in Coimbatore, Madras, Tuticorin and Ponmalai. However, there was no systematic support from the party's top brass for workers' struggle as the party chief Annadurai preferred not to be drawn into legal entanglements.

Once Karunanidhi assumed power, the DMK did form umbrella unions whose function however was not organizing labour around demands but social control. The constant agitational mode of the DMK strengthened the ideological coherence of the party activists, except the opposition to the Craft Scheme. There were few instances of mass participation or the DMK surging ahead in public opinion. It was only when the anti-Hindi agitations got more intense in the middle of the 60s that the party had an exponential growth, something even the party leadership had failed to foresee. The DMK tried to shape itself as the champion of the lower

castes and heightened its rhetoric. But, the communication between the Scheduled Castes and the DMK was not smooth. The former claimed that the DMK leaders were aiding soft Hindu conservative tendencies. Their mass leader and fiery orator, Karunanidhi, was strongly criticized for his pro-Hindu views. Therefore the DMK came forth as a party of intermediary castes who were not interested in the emancipation of the Dalits, despite their anti-Brahmanical views.

The MSCF became increasingly skeptical about the Dravidian parties. In particular, it was perceived by the federation that E. V. Ramaswamy's promise of transforming the DK into a Paraiyar (Dalit) Party was hollow and was designed merely to keep the Scheduled Castes within his sphere of influence, thus preserving his personal political agenda. Further however, the approach from within the Adi-Dravida leadership to the DK was full of contradictions. The MSCF which initially saw hope in their anti-Brahmanical rhetoric, now began to say that the DK and the DMK were instead a means to establish in the region the dominance of non-Brahmin upper castes.³⁴

Class struggle in Tamil Nadu

The Communist Party of India (CPI) could mainly establish a base among the Dalits of the Kaveri valley in Tamil Nadu. The agitations of class interests spearheaded by the communists played a significant role in mobilizing the Adi-Dravida communities behind them. There was a welcome addition of pressure on the government due to the agitation and propaganda by the CPI in Thanjore owing to which the MSCF and the Dravidian parties among other constituents of the

³⁴Fortnightly Report for the First half of November 1948.

opposition lent their support to the movement. The strong-arm tactics of the government against the communists to suppress their activities was strongly condemned by leaders such as Annadurai.³⁵ It is thus that communist activity in the early 1950s saw tacit support by parties opposing the Congress. The leadership of the Scheduled Castes, seeing the effect on the masses of communist mobilization particularly in Thanjore decided to act. The AISCF thus sent advisories to its provincial branches, having been battered by electoral reverses, to consider alliances with parties that were likeminded, which the MSCF followed up on.³⁶

The communists initially formed an alliance with the then newly formed Praja Socialist Party (PSP) with hopes of making some electoral headway. The PSP was initially keen to make common cause with them in agrarian and labor issues. However as it was an offshoot of the Congress and its leaders such as Jaiprakash Narayan possessed a tendency, to lean towards the Congress rather than the CPI. Thus the PSP used its peasant fronts to counter the CPI as it supported the position of movements such as Bhoodan to solve the issue of land reforms.³⁷ The PSP broke with the united front of leftist parties and formed the government in the

³⁵ In their May Day speeches, both the leaders of the Kazghmaite parties reiterated that while they had differences with the communists on their insurrectionary and violent methods, the ends to an oppression-free and classless society were in consonance with the programs of the Dravidian parties. See Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of May 1950 (Confidential) TNA.

³⁶ While the secretary of the MSCF EN Rajbhoj was not very keen on the idea of a direct alliance, his sympathies remained with the communist cadre persecuted by the state machinery and the realization that they enjoyed support among the Scheduled Castes. See Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of June 1950 (Confidential) TNA.

³⁷ *Fortnightly Report for the first Half of SEPTEMBER 1953 (Confidential) TNA.*

Travancore-Cochin state on its own which further exacerbated the differences between the two.³⁸

The Kisan Sabha in 1953 renewed its efforts to regain its foothold in Thanjore and to expand beyond it. The CPI launched a campaign among the peasantry to agitate them against the Tanjore Pannaiyals Protection Act which had failed to live up to expectations. The peasantry were encouraged to raise various demands such as right to sixty percent of the produce from the owners of the lands they worked on. Protests were also launched against the policy of lifting control over food grains by the government.³⁹ There was a revival of the movement and different regions appeared to be coming into the fold of the agitation. The communist leaders in South Arcot attempted to replicate the struggles of Thanjore. They launched a campaign for the repeal of certain clauses in the Pannaiyal Protection Act in Chidambaram. In Tiruchirapalli, the peasants were organized against the non-payment of dues by mirasidars where as in Tirunelveli, there were disputes which led to the occurrence of rioting. A conciliation officer had to be appointed through the forced intervention of the district collector to settle the disputes.⁴⁰

Yet, these efforts appeared to pay little in the form of dividends beyond a certain point. The idea of constant agitation appeared to not be dear to the peasantry and the Kisan Sabha meetings saw declining attendances. In certain

³⁸ The PSP activists tried to carry out reforms on the lines of what they had implemented in Travencore-Cochin, in Tanjore. *Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of July 1954 (Confidential)* TNA.

³⁹Fortnightly Report for the First Half of March 1953 (Confidential) TNA.

⁴⁰*Fortnightly Report for the First Half of June (Confidential)* TNA.

areas of Tanjore and Tirunelveli there are reports of many communist sympathizers having joined the Congress. Eventually, amicable settlements were made between the peasantry and the landlords and consequently the influence of the communists was on the wane.⁴¹ There was a change in track by the communists and they started supporting the MSCF by supporting their candidate for a by-election 1954. These tactics however remained to have little purchase.

It has been propounded that if the CPI had managed to hold on to its base among the Scheduled Caste Peasants and the agrarian proletariat, they would have been in a position to continue the agitation for much longer. The landlords in these areas however had a varied arsenal of weaponry to bring the peasantry to acceptance of the prevailing social order, although with minor concessions. In spite of the Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act of 1955, there were multiple loopholes within the system that the landlords could exploit. Owing to hardly any of the largely illiterate peasantry possessing deeds, they could not prove their occupancy. In the face of growing opposition to their dominance, the landlords would respond by influencing and bribing the village level officials in order to manipulate records and hence discipline the restive peasantry with the threat of evictions.⁴² The influence of the communists declined in the mid 1950s, not only because of their internal factors such as their preoccupations with international politics which did not resonate with rural masses, and fatigue due to the brutal repression by the state, but also because the PSP and later the DMK began to challenge them.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² MM Bouton, *Agrarian Radicalism*, pp. 193-196.

The communists were outdone in regional expression by the DMK whom they began to oppose with more shrillness on the former's stand of Dravidian Nationalism and secessionist talk. Thus, the CPI began countering DMK conferences on Dravida Nadu by organizing 'anti Dravida Nadu' conferences which made them seem less sympathetic to Tamil regional aspirations. The Dravidians were able to club the communists together with the Congress as the Communists tended to focus more on economic issues to the detriment of cultural ones, as Nehru did. The DMK took issue with the fact that the CPI took the Indian national identity as a given and the only basis of identification. The DMK also outmanoeuvred the CPI on caste by stating that the latter were blind to this paramount fault line of the Indian society and hence the Dravidians were more authentic socialists than the ones who formally claimed to be. The subaltern and 'son of the soil' rhetoric was something the CPI failed to counter in Tamil Nadu, even as this was not something they faced in Bengal and Kerala, which saw increasing support for their programs.

By 1956, there was some relief brought by the tenancy protection acts legislated by the assembly. However, it was largely to the benefit of the already well placed tenants. The Adi-Dravida community became landless labourers and their consciousness shifted away from agitations towards the various government schemes of the day which had been designed to bring some ameliorative effects.⁴³

Due to their alliance with Dravidian parties which thrived in incendiary rhetoric

⁴³ A district level official in Thanjore undertook an extensive study of the Nagapattinam taluk and concluded that the Scheduled Castes thought better of trying to gain land and preferred labor status which promised fixed wages. The hegemony of the prevailing social order was strong enough for them to except the status quo of subservience despite communist activity in the area. See Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Report on the Implementation of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Land Tenancy Rights*, 1969, pp. 35-38.

against forward caste groups and North Indians, the communists were put in a compromising and embarrassing position of having to distance themselves. This led to the communists becoming suspicious of EVR and even appealing to people to reject his provocative utterances.⁴⁴

The DMK raised the issues of the peasants, adding to its identitarian politics to the process. It raised the demand that there was outside labour being employed to cultivate land and that this should be stopped. This defence of the indigenous attracted a substantial section of the downtrodden peasantry. In Coimbatore, they organised a Tillers' Conference with the specific purpose of counter communist influence and urging their followers to resist outside employment in cultivation in the countryside.⁴⁵ Not only did the DMK pose a challenge but even the DK began to distance themselves from this. EVR called for honorable settlements with the capitalist and feudal classes on the assumption that some gains will be made out of them.⁴⁶

Concomitantly, the MSCF became even more resolute with Ambedkar's resignation from the cabinet. Seat-sharing talks started between the Federation and the Dravidian parties. Fundamental points of contestation between the two were however existent due to the contradictory interests of the Scheduled Caste community and the interests of the intermediary castes represented by the Dravidian parties. It is thus that the federation carried out intense campaigns against the Dravidian parties for their perceived doublespeak and also against the

⁴⁴*Fortnightly Report for the First Half of July 1953 (Confidential) TNA.*

⁴⁵*Fortnightly Report for the First half of September 1954 (Confidential) TNA. Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of September 1954 (Confidential) TNA.*

⁴⁶*Fortnightly Report for the Second Half of February 1955 (Confidential) TNA.*

Congress ministries for their caste bias. However, their influence was limited such that they managed eventually in the 1952 Provincial Elections to get four of their candidates elected to the assembly whereas the Congress again formed the government, winning most seats reserved for the SCs.⁴⁷

Several radical SC leaders within the DMK, who had heavily criticized their party in the provincial conference, left their ranks to join the newly formed Republican Party of India (hereafter RPI). However, the RPI weakened at the edges of the political sphere of Tamil Nadu and lacked autonomous activity. They had no option but to follow the DK and the DMK. The MSCF was however left in isolation with the toning down of rhetoric by the DK. Therefore it chose to side with the Communists and contested assembly by-elections with them in July 1954.⁴⁸ The MSCF was confused about their strategies and ideological allies when the Congress candidates won in these elections.

By 1950's Ambedkar had clearly decided that Buddhism would be the religion for him and for the untouchables of the country to embrace. When other religions spoke about soul, God and life after death, Buddhism was the only religion, he claimed, that preached Karuna (love), Prajna (anti-superstition) and Samata (equality). These are the aspects which attracted him towards Buddhism and these according to him are the prerequisites for a happy and good life.⁴⁹

⁴⁷*Fortnightly Reports for the following: Second Half of July 1953, First Half of August 1953 and Second Half of October 1953 (Confidential) TNA. Also see S V Kogekar and Richard L Parks eds. Report on the Indian General Elections 1951-52 Bombay, 1956, pp. 90-95,*

⁴⁸*Fortnightly Report for the First Half of July 1954 (Confidential) TNA.*

⁴⁹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (eds.), Vol.17, Part III, Maharashtra: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee Higher Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2003, p.515.

Ambedkar further suggested construction of big temples and viharas, establishment of high schools and colleges, essay writing competitions on topics related to Buddhism and to distribute prizes. These are some of the steps he suggested, in addition to reading the Panch Sila, so that the men who convert should be convinced about renouncing Hindu religion and become a new man.⁵⁰ At the call of Ambedkar for mass conversion, few thousands in Tamil Nadu converted to Buddhism. But after his death, shortly after conversion, the movement could not sustain among the Tamils. This can largely be attributed to the organizational failure, lack of leadership and lack of ideological and political clarity of the RPI. Soon after the death of Ambedkar, the party also faced a split into two factions.⁵¹

Post-Ambedkar Adi-Dravida Movement

Post 1956 witnessed the emergence of a new kind of Adi-Dravida emancipatory politics, particularly in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu. The caste conflicts in Tamil Nadu were largely between the untouchables and the middle castes. The two major communities in the region were the *Thevars* (known as Mukkulathor) and the *Pallars* (who preferred to be called as Devendra Kula Vellalar). *Thevars* are middle castes who constituted around 45% and the *Pallars* are untouchable castes who were around 20% of the total population of Mudukulathur. Mudukulathur is a village in the Ramanathapuram district of TamilNadu.⁵² Both

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 510.

⁵¹ The RPI split into two factions

⁵² T.S. Sokkalingam and Dinakaran, (ed.), *Muthukulathur Kalavaram*, Sindhanai Veleedu, Dindugal, p. 5.

the communities were agricultural communities, backward educationally and economically. Despite the similar backwardness in the two communities, the *Thevars* have been dominating the *Pallars* for a long time due to the formers' numerical dominance as well as social status in the state. Some of the conscious and concerned individuals in the Pallar community realized the fact that unless they came together, they cannot escape the social subjugation of their community. As a result, Perumal Peter, a *Pallar*, established the *Bhu Vaisia Indirakula Sangam*.⁵³ The Sangam was founded in colonial times but continued its activities in post-independent period as well. Peter took special care in educating the children of the *Pallar* community. With the increasing activities of the Sangam, the *Pallars* became more aware of their civil and political rights the Indian independence had brought them. Particularly with the relentless efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, the exterior castes are guaranteed certain constitutional safeguards including universal adult franchise in independent India.

With the increasing activities of the Sangam and the growing awareness about their constitutional rights the *Pallars* started taking part in the political process in the state. The social awareness and the active involvement of the community in the politics further emboldened with the political entry of a dynamic ex-soldier, Immanuel, belonging to the *Pallar* caste. Immanuel did not get the Congress party ticket to contest in the elections held in 1952. He was committed to the upliftment of the community and continued to fight for them throughout his life. It is noteworthy to mention that the first general elections were held for multi-member

⁵³ K. Ragupathi, *The History of Devendrakula Vellalar Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1920-2000*, unpublished thesis, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 2007, pp. 101-103.

constituencies. In that election, the *Pallars* exercised their franchise in support of the Indian National Congress (INC) while the *Thevars* contested from the Forward Block party. Both the candidates, Muthuramalinga Thevar and Mottaiyat Kudumban, got elected from the Forward Block party. It is interesting to note that the latter being a *Pallar* got more votes in the elections than the former. All these social and political developments of the *Pallar* community transpired *Thevars* to attack the former. The attack over the *Pallars* by the *Thevars* took place because of the medieval mindset of the latter that was unable to accept the former as their fellow citizens having entitled to make their own political choices. This mindset manifests the social stigma that was entrenched in *Thevar* community about the *Pallars*. Immanuel fought vociferously against all these social taboos that the *Pallars* were ascribed to. As a result of his efforts, the *Pallars* emboldened and retaliated whenever and wherever they could against the *Thevars*. The animosity between the two communities continued unabatedly and aggravated further in the second general elections in 1957. Despite his victory in the elections, Muthuramalinga Thevar demanded absolute allegiance of the *Pallars* to *Thevar* community. The clashes between the two communities for the first time came to the fore after the Mudukulathur riots in 1957.⁵⁴

Muthuramalinga Thevar was the tallest leader of the *Thevars* in the region and an anti-Congress face. The *Pallars* were pro-Congress as they thought that Congress was the only party which worked for the upliftment of their community. One other reason being them pro-Congress was that they would never support a political formation supported by the *Thevars*, because the *Pallars* wanted to

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 104.

maintain a distinct political and communitarian identity. Under these circumstances, Muthuramalinga Thevar ran for elections in Mudukulathur constituency and the *Thevars* wanted the *Pallars* to vote for him. However, the *Pallars* had voted for the Congress candidate, which angered the *Thevars* to a great extent.

As all these reasons contributed to the simmering communal tensions which was building towards a violent caste clashes. The District Collector gauging the situation, in order to prevent any sort of violence, called for a peace meeting on 10th September 1957. The meeting was attended by ten people from the *Thevar* community, three *Pallars* and two *Nadars*. The *Thevars* were led by Muthuramalinga Devar and Immanuel Sekaran led the Pallar delegates. The meeting witnessed some verbal quarrel between Devar and Immanuel because of which Devar walked out. Immanuel was murdered the next day and it led to a series of violent clashes in the subsequent days.⁵⁵ People belonging to both the communities lost their lives during the violence and which led to full-fledged riots on 20th September 1957. A detailed analysis of the events would reveal that the *Pallars* belonging to the Depressed Classes, who have been largely oppressed in the Hindu social order, sent out a clear message that they are not going to take any more caste oppression. If they are attacked, they will also retaliate. One can see a marked difference between the Adi-Dravida movement prior to 1956 and post-Mudukulathur. The former were peaceful, petitioning and protests within the constitutional framework, whereas the later believed in an eye for eye. The leaders

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 109.

of the *Pallar* movement claimed that once they started retaliating against the caste Hindus, the incidences of atrocities on them have reduced.⁵⁶

Kilvenmani Massacre

The massacre forty two men, women and children at Kilvenmani on 26th December 1968 exposed the fault lines which lay at the heart of the rural, social and economic setup of Tamil Nadu. It was, on surface, an agrarian dispute between the landless agricultural labourers and the organized might of the landlords who resisted the former's demand for a wage increase. In fact, wage dispute is what the press in its reportage of the incident confined itself to.⁵⁷ The agricultural workers had been organised under the banner of the peasant union of the then newly formed Communist Party of India (Marxist) which had become a source of great unease for the landlords who had consequently counter-organized themselves under the banner of the Paddy Producers Association. The underlying reason which knits the social structure to the economic was that all the forty two men, women and children belonged to the *Paraiyan* caste of Dalits who in their association with a union had not only challenged the feudal class structure but transgressed the boundaries of caste obedience which had been sanctified in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu.⁵⁸

The agrarian structure in the rice surplus areas of Tamil Nadu like Thanjavur is complex. The *Panniyals* were the agrarian communities bonded to the land

⁵⁶ T.S. Sakkalingam and Dinakaran, (ed.), *Muthukulathur Kalavaram*, Sindhanai Veleedu, Dindugal, p. 15.

⁵⁷ See Mythili Sivaraman, Venmani and the Free Press. *Mainstream*, February 22 1969. Pp. 30-31.

⁵⁸ K. Ragupathi, The History of Devendrakula Vellalar Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1920-2000, unpublished thesis, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 2007, pp. 115-118.

through ties of tenancy or labour. It mostly started from the community owning small patches of land which turned into tenancy and then gradually dependence on the *mirasidar* or the landlords. It so happened that the landlords were almost always members of the Brahmin or upper echelons of the non-Brahmin castes while the labourers were almost always from the *Paraiyan* community. Hence to a system of feudal economic relations was added the structure of obedience and power based on caste.

Thanjavur has been repeatedly pointed out as a region with an extremely uneven pattern of land ownership. The percentage of tenancy at 33.6% in Thanjavur was much higher than the state average of just over 11%.⁵⁹ The land use pattern has been constantly dominated by absentee landlordism and hence the aim of growth in production envisaged by the government in the 1960s was not being realised. Studies by international agencies to see the feasibility of Thanjavur for aid projects marked the district as not suitable for immediate growth in agriculture. The problem was compounded by the introduction of modern mechanistic devices like tractors where the conditions for production did not exist. The introduction of so called Green Revolution techniques into the countryside of Thanjavur exacerbated the polarization between the landless and the landed.

In this region where caste oppression was entwined with class polarization, the Communist peasant organizations took root in the 1940s and began to expand in the 1950s. The organization of the Dalit peasants by the communists brought them into direct conflict with the landlords who were used to their writ being the law in

⁵⁹ See Mythili Sivaraman, Rumbings of Class Struggle in Tamil Nadu, in *Haunted by Fire: Essays on Caste, Class Exploitation and Emancipation*, Leftword Books, Delhi, p. 181.

the land and in the villages they controlled. The militancy of the communists irked the landlords who resented the demand from the peasants for wage increases. There were frequent cases of strikes and arbitration by government officials.

The landlord resentment against the unionizing agrarian proletariat had a distinctive casteist ring to it. The upper caste landlords who organized under the banner of the Paddy Producers Association took out marches in the district with slogans of condemnation of the *Panaiyals* and the *Paraiyans*. Hence, the wage dispute was also a ground for social tensions as the community relations, which had been ossified for generations, were in flux.

The small peasants and landless labourers of Thanjavur region worked under a system where landlords operated through upper caste intermediaries. Much of the land was also in possession of temples or monasteries where the upper castes naturally had a say over monopolization of what was cultivated. Tenants had to pay anything from forty to sixty five percentage of their cultivation produce as rent. The labourers lost out on wages primarily because a lot of government wasteland called *paramboke* in the local parlance. Due to the level of indebtedness, the practice of bonded labour and the landlords exercising disproportionate control through caste hierarchies, the labourers were obliged to keep not only themselves but also their kith and kin at the service of the landlord for what could be an indefinite period. The landlords also had the power to call labourers from their own caste from outside villages and use coercive disciplining tactics like denial of work, leaving the land fallow and collude with the police to discipline workers.

The dispute escalated in the late 1960s in the context when the whole country was in the grip of agrarian unrest. The landlords and the press during the trouble and after the massacre attributed the conflict to the growth of communist militancy and the assertion of bargaining power from the landless labourers for their working conditions. It is also a fact that while the Congress in the 1930s and 40s had initiated limited reforms through temple entry for the depressed classes, it was the communists who led the movement for the opening of public places like tea shops to the *Paraiyans*. The CPI(M) at the time came to be known as a *Paraiyan Katchi* or a party of the Paraiyan caste in that period, in local parlance. The ownership structure of the land was skewed in the favour of those with more than fifteen acres of land.⁶⁰ The Fair Wages Act initiated by the new DMK government failed to provide any relief as the landlords in conjunction with the Tahsildars could bypass the legislation.⁶¹

Tensions in the area rose after punitive measures were effected on the landless in many areas including the use of upper caste labourers from outside to cultivate the land if unionized workforce went on a strike for their demands. In December 1969, Venamani was in a similar state of trouble. Peasant activists affiliated to the union of communists were murdered and workers who were organized refused to work. The workers were confronted by a resentful landlord association set out to nip the bud of any rebellion against centuries of authority. The immediate trigger for the incident was the abduction of a communist sympathiser by the landlords.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶¹ K. Ragupathi, *The History of Devendrakula Vellalar Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1920-2000*, unpublished thesis, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 2007, p. 121.

His fellow workers from the community went to get him released and in the ensuing scuffle an agent of the landlord was killed.

The massacre was a chilling and well-orchestrated response to the rebellious workers who had transgressed their caste bondage. According to the prosecution at that time which was corroborated by the district court, a well-planned attack ensued with the henchmen rounding up the *Harijan* locality in Kilvenamani and going on a rampage, assaulting workers and their kin. It was then that a number of them hid inside a hut and the hut was burnt down, killing forty two people- mostly women and children of the *Paraiyan* caste.

The incident is a defining moment in the history of caste struggles and class exploitation in Tamil Nadu. All the accused who were arrested were the *mirasidar*'s stock- gentlemen who went on a rampage to assert their authority through violence. They were later acquitted by the high court even as the *Harijans* found involved in the murder of the agent of the landlords were sentenced and their punishment duly upheld. The denial of justice in Kilvenmani is one of the examples where the sanctity of the legal institutions of the country was found to be exposed. Kilvenmani became a precedence which was repeated in the acquittal of the massacres at Laxmanpur Bathe and Baithani Tola in Bihar.

The role of the then newly installed DMK government comes for an interesting reading. The party had mobilised itself in opposition to the hegemony of the Brahmins and championed the cause of Tamil autonomy as against North Indian cultural imposition. Its rhetoric had been against exploitation and it mobilised

people against caste hierarchies which existed in Tamil Nadu.⁶² The DMK had also opposed the use of religion to perpetuate exploitation in the region. Hence the role of the government was especially contentious during the whole affair. The DMK did announce policies to mitigate the exploitative effects on workers by introducing legislation that improved wages. However, the wage policy, as pointed out, was loath to be implemented on the ground due to the collusion of the bureaucracy with the landlords. The demand for an ordinance to immediately give relief to the workers was only implemented after the massacre. The DMK also made attempts to show it as amenable to the agrarian elites who elicited sympathetic reactions within the press and the mostly upper caste urban civil society.⁶³ Hence there seems to have been a tempering of the rhetoric against the elites by the DMK once it came to power. Its record on the agrarian question at that time is a mixed bag where half-hearted attempts were made for improvement but there was a reticence in implementation due to a severe backlash from the landlords who had the capacity to mobilise even the upper caste landless against the *paraiyans*.

The massacre was a watershed in the agrarian and social relations of Tamil Nadu as it underscored the need for further radicalization of the Dravidian agenda which had failed to focus on the stratified layers of exploitation. The communists had played a crucial part in that but failed to connect with the larger terrain due to their inability to comprehend the cultural and national question that the Dravidian movement had posed in front of them. For the Dalits fighting centuries of

⁶² Narendra Subramanian, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens and Democracy in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 133.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 134.

exploitation in the Kaveri delta, this was the culmination of the brute force that they had been subjected to while trying to improve their conditions. The martyrs' column that still stands in the village became a symbol of that struggle.

Conclusion

The Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu had a mixed experience with regard to policy implementation for their benefit, especially during the post-independence period. The Congress, dominated by Rajagopalachari, since the 1930s had to contend with the charge of dilly dallying on implementation of measures to alleviate the handicap of the depressed classes. The foremost conflict had come in the form of the temple entry issue which had polarized opinions within the Congress party. The Congress had to contend with a push from its Dravidian opponents as well as the provincial Scheduled Caste Federation for a gradual implementation of the same.

Towards the end of the 1940s during the post-independence period, the debates within the Congress focused on the need to further expand the ambit of reform. The provincial government had to contend with the critique of the Scheduled Caste leaders from within its own ranks. The critique obviously had a role to play in the relative proactive role of the Rajagopalachari government to be seen as serious about Harijan issues.

Rajagopalachari, however, was living on borrowed time in Tamil Nadu. By the 1950s, the split within the ranks of the DK and the emergence of the DMK meant that Dravidian nationalist politics had acquired a teeth and assertiveness which

made the survival of a government more or less oriented towards the miniscule upper castes politically untenable. The replacement of Rajagopalachari with Kamraj was a boost for the Congress as it not only gave the party a prominent face from the backward *Nadar* caste but also helped counter its pro-Brahmin image. Kamraj is credited with expanding the ambit of welfare works and doing much for the Harijans in particular.

The Madras Scheduled Caste Federation or its parent body the AISCF in Tamil Nadu struggled to find their feat in this competitive environment. Both the Dravidians and the Congress made overtures to the Adi-Dravidas and a considerable section of the community supported these parties. Ambedkar had left the cabinet and was charting out an independent course of action at this juncture. However, while there was a significant population of the Adi-Dravidas, it failed to consolidate as a political base. The MSCF/AISCF was unable to rise above its identity as a sectional interest and was affected by the same stigmatizing which later befell the communists who were type casted as a *Paraiyan Katchi* or a party of the Paraiyan caste. The AISCF in fact allied with the communists in the 1954 elections but received a severe jolt. Thereafter, most of its leaders joined the newly formed Republican Party of India which itself failed to make any strong headway.

Ambedkar by this time had begun to think of the decisive break from Hinduism that he had so long been contemplating. The conversion to Buddhism marked a departure point which radicalized the consciousness of the scheduled castes. At the same time, the consciousness was troubling as it created conflicts and dissensions within the social order which had been hitherto nestled on the calm lullaby of meek subjugation.

Conflicts originated in various parts of the state including Mudukulathur. The rioting between the numerically dominant but socially backward *Thevars* and the formerly untouchable *Pallars* were a watershed as they showed not only the attempts by the Adi Dravidas to break their shackles but also the limits of the Dravidian politics crucially. The limit was even further exposed during the Kilvenamani Massacre when the DMK had ousted the Congress barely months ago.

The DMK had projected itself as the champion of the subaltern voice to the extreme and had gone out of the way in its propaganda against perceived and actual Brahmin dominance and its political manifestation in the Congress. Its failure to take definitive stands on the agrarian question meant that the DMK ultimately remained a party of the city streets which had cut its teeth in the anti-Hindi agitations of the mid-60s. Its newly formed government during the time of the massacre had shown that it lacked the decisiveness as it had claimed to deal with issues where the class conflict was acute to the extreme. The DMK tempered its stance considerably in relation to the polarization between the landlords and the poor landless laborers and it manifested in the inability of the prosecutor to get the alleged killers of Kilvenamani who came from the gentlemanly stock, convicted.

Even as Dravidian politics has come to define Tamil politics and identity in the subsequent decades, the ugliness of caste conflict and its inevitably leaving the Dalits at the receiving end has not subsided and rears its head from time to time. The VCK, another Dalit political party based in its North, seems to have shown that Dalit politics in the province failed to acquire an appeal that could even take along the entire community together. Even as the Adi-Dravida tradition of

movement has evolved, it has been paled by the existence of movements which had the capacity to evoke far greater sentiments- the rival strands of Indian and Tamil nationalism.

CONCLUSION

The Adi-Dravida movement began in the 1880's in Tamil Nadu. The first set of people to take keen interest on the Indian society and culture were the colonial ethnographers and the Christian missionaries. The initial understanding that Indians were slaves of the rigid Hindu caste order, where brahmin was the supreme and rest all subjects, changed over a period of time. Their interactions with the people and further research helped them understand the complexities of the Indian social order. Few of them believed that the foundation of the Indian society was based on caste and meddling with the system would lead to the collapse of the social order. Whereas, some other scholars saw the caste system to be an evil practice and one to be abolished. Hence, the first efforts at amelioration of certain social disabilities faced by the lower castes were attempted by the colonialists and the missionaries. It cannot be said that Adi-Dravidas were of special interest to the scholars or the evangelists. It was only after the mass conversions in the 1870's, and the people to majorly converted were Adi-Dravidas, it was then understood by the missionaries who their targets had to be. Before the period of mass conversions, the brahmins and other upper castes were the primary targets of the missionaries. Their patient and repeated efforts at converting the upper castes did not yield expected results, whereas, the Adi-Dravidas volunteered to be converted, that too in large numbers.

The efforts of the missions and the colonial government at educating the Adi-Dravidas did help the community to advance. There was also large scale overseas migrations in the nineteenth century and most of these migrants were untouchables. These migrations gave an avenue for the depressed classes to escape

the feudal order. Education led to the Adi-Dravidas getting certain government jobs and by the end of the nineteenth century there was a class of educated Adi-Dravidas, who no more believed that they were lower than any of the other castes and wanted to be treated as equals. They gradually understood that political power is utmost important, for the uplift of their communities. Hence one could witness establishment of Adi-Dravida associations and magazines through the final decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century.

Iyothee Thass was the pioneer in beginning a movement of the Adi-Dravidas. He formed the Sakhya Buddhist society and began a journal *Oru Paisa Tamilan*, which was later renamed as *Tamilan*. Iyotee Thass after his in-depth research of classical Tamil texts and scriptures, came to an understanding that Adi-Dravidas during the reign of King Ashoka were Buddhists, who later were rendered as untouchables in the Indian society by brahmins. He began a movement for re-conversion to Buddhism. The Tamil Buddhists established their branches in different parts of south India and also in far off places like Burma. They used *Tamilan* for the effective propagation of their ideas. However, after the demise of Iyothee Thass in 1914, the movement faced certain slowdown. The movement however regained pace, as Iyothee Thass had left behind a number of able followers to lead the movement. Over a period of time, the head office of the Buddhist society had to shift from Chennai to Kolar Gold Fields. Ever since the shift, North Arcot and KGF became the main centers of the Buddhist movement. Tamil Buddhism which started as a socio-religious reform movement, remained so for large part of its life. However, the changing contours of Tamil Nadu politics in the 1920's, brought about a change in rhetoric of the Buddhist movement as well.

The content of the *Tamilan* became increasingly political, whereas, religion took a backseat. Tamil Buddhism kept its relevance alive till 1936, publishing of *Tamilan* stopped the same year and so did the movement. The recruits of the Buddhist movement later became foot soldiers of EVR's Self-Respect Movement.

Another leader of the Adi-Dravidas to emerge onto the scene around the same period was Rettaimalai Sreenivasan. He founded the *Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha* in the year 1891 and the magazine *Paraiyan* in 1893. Sreenivasan's methods of functioning were different from that of Iyothee Thass. Iyothee Thass was a socio-religious critique of the brahminical Hindu society, whereas, Sreenivasan functioned mainly in the political realm. Sreenivasan did not advocate for change in religion of the Adi-Dravidas, he in fact was for reform within the Hindu society. The *Pariyan* carried articles on all issues which were of social and political relevance to the Adi-Dravidas. His political life can be broken up into two parts, one from 1890 till 1900, when he left to London, but ended up in South Africa. Next from 1919 when he came back to India till his demise. In his second phase he was member of the Madras Legislative Assembly, one of the two delegates who represented the depressed classes at the Round Table Conferences and always remained a sane voice in the cause of the Adi-Dravidas.

The early twentieth century saw the emergence of two prominent ideologies which have held sway over the politics of modern Tamil Nadu than any others. First was the emergence of Indian nationalism against British colonialism and second was the Dravidian Tamil nationalism as opposed to the brahmin dominated Congress. Whatever was required and whatever of that was delivered in the way of political and social reform for the Adi Dravidas came about as a result

of that movement. The Congress under Gandhi had been in a conundrum regarding the untouchable question for a while now. Gandhi was pulled in .which largely had a grip over his thought. What evolved as the Congress position on the issue was largely a fudge- opposition of untouchability but belief in the system of *Varna*. In his South Africa days, Tamils had been one of the most loyal followers of Gandhi and his methods against the racist policies of the white settler colonialists. However, in Tamil Nadu which had none of the siege mentality generated by being abroad and an immediate as well as a long term history of the critique of orthodox Hinduism, such a position was not going to elicit much sympathy.

The Dravidian movement started off as a reform exercise under the aegis of the Justice party in 1916. But the intellectual teeth were added to it after EV Ramaswamy Periyar dissociated from the Congress and formed the Self Respect Movement. It was the latter and its extensive and incendiary rhetoric against Brahminism which brought it more in line with the aspirations of the Adi Dravidas and their leadership. However, the movement may have been non-Brahmin in character, but it was criticised as being dominated by the middle castes- some of whom gradually became much more aggressive and virulent against the Scheduled Castes. The formation of the Dravidar Kazhgam in 1944 and their championing of Tamil ethno nationalism did not attract the Adi Dravidas for the exact same fears of being dominated which were evident in the upper caste tinged Indian nationalism of the Congress party.

Hence it was quite natural that the Adi Dravida political leadership including M.C. Rajah and R. Srinivasan had much more trust and dependence on

whatever concessions could be enacted by the limited constitutionalism of the British government. The Scheduled Caste reception to the British rule in general had been a tad more favorable because of historical circumstances- one being the momentous battle in Maharashtra where a caste oppressive Maratha regime was defeated and bundled out of Pune in 1818 primarily on the strength of the lower caste Mahar soldiers. Moreover, partly out of enlightenment ideals and partly as a tactical ploy to weaken the nationalist plank of the Congress, the British were seen to be more sympathetic to the plight of the Scheduled Castes.

In many senses, it was the Adi Dravida movement which acted as a path finder for the pan Indian Dalit movement that was to emerge. We have already talked about the position of separate electorate for the depressed classes emerging from the Tamil Dalit leaders. The idea of conversion to Buddhism as an emancipatory tool against Brahminical oppression also came from the Adi Dravida movement some fifty years before it was implemented on a much grander scale by Dr. Ambedkar. However, the movement was also dependent upon the stance of the pan Indian movement on many issues. Politically, the Scheduled Caste Federation or its successor the RPI could never enjoy the kind of successes compared to its intellectual acumen.

It was hence that the movement had to negotiate in terms of the reforms that it aspired to get from the British as well as the Congress ministries. The Congress in particular was a tricky situation as it required not just petitions but denouncements at periodic intervals to push the party towards action on issues like temple entry in particular. The issue of temple entry had a much larger significance in the southern half of the country as the caste system tended to

display some of its most perverse characteristics in this region. The region also had a much sharper and older tradition of reform striking at the roots of the Brahminical order. Hence social justice had become a plank of every political party in some form or another in the colonial as well as post colonial eras.

The Adi Dravida movement thus had to contend with various political formations trying to attach different significance to its aspirations. Apart from the Congress and the Dravidian nationalists, the communists were much later entrants to the scene. But they were ready to take the state on and face repression for implementing the economic demands of the landless. As independence came, the fight for political rights had been settled at least in a formal sense by the chairmanship of the constitution making committee by an untouchable himself. However, the question of parity and abolition of various discriminations, particularly in the countryside came into much sharper focus post independence. The incidents at Mudukalithur and Kilvenamani were symptomatic of the agrarian question coming at the centre of the discourse, now that many of the issues regarding constitution and social inclusion had been legally settled with the enactment of anti discrimination laws.

Thus throughout the 50s and the 60s, the Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu confronted itself with the question of land, labor and exploitation to which many of the socially oppressive practices of boycott, denial of public spaces and ill treatment were linked. The period also brought into sharp focus, the limitation of the radical ethno nationalist plank of the Dravidians as they were found vacillating in their approach on the question of enhancing rights for the socially marginalized and economically deprived Adi Dravidas.

The one and a quarter century or so of the Adi Dravida movement has brought to light the challenges confronted by a subjugated community as it strove to first culturally-intellectually, and then politically find a way for itself through the maze of the colonial and postcolonial socio political set up. The growth of the press and the modern means of communication certainly helped the movement and it is clear that it was not the only movement founded on a nativist logic. Similar movements had been running in Punjab in the 1920s for example which sought to present the scheduled caste as the native of the soil subjugated by the Aryans. Today, looking back at the journey of those traditions and its debates with the questions of nationalism in particular- in the context of continued killings because of inter caste marriages and the machismo culture of caste associations, the thoughts and ideals of these years are quite revealing of their radicalism.

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APPENDIX - III

A Panchama Protest meeting.

Under the auspices of the Dravida Mahajana Sabha (Established in 1892), a largely attended public Meeting of the Dravidas (misnamed Panchamas) was held at the Sabha premises, No. 77, Poonamalle Road, Madras, on Sunday the 24th July 1921, at 6 p. m., with Mr. V. G. Vasudeva Pillay, Municipal Councillor, Madras Corporation and the President of the Sabha in the Chair, to protest against the resolution of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar to be moved at the next sitting of the Madras Legislative Council for changing the name "Pariah" and "Panchama" into "Adi Dravida". The following resolutions were unanimously adopted after they were duly proposed by Mr. P. Venkatachellam S. Sundaramoorthy Pillay, seconded by Mr. R. T. Ramakrishna Pillay, and Supported by P. Venkatachellam S. Sadasiva Pillay, S. Somu Pillay, M. Jayavulu, and several others.

RESOLUTIONS.

1. This meeting strongly urges that the consideration of the resolution of Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar before the Madras Legislative Council to change the name of the "Panchamas" into "Adi Dravidas" should be deferred in view of the fact that a similar resolution moved by the same gentleman in the Madras Corporation had been indefinitely postponed pending a definite representation from the community.
2. This meeting further resolves that the considered view of every section of the Community should be ascertained before any nomenclature is adopted, as the name to be accepted by the Government will be of the greatest importance to the future of the Community.
3. This meeting desires also to express the fact that the term "Adi Dravida" has on account of and in connection with the recent disturbances at Madras, become odious and earnestly recommends in addition to several other reasons, its being abandoned as a suitable substitute.
4. This meeting feels also incumbent upon it to express its conviction that the attempts on the part of those, who do not belong to the community to label it by any particular name cannot be conducive to the proper settlement of the question or to the promotion of inter-communal cordiality.
5. This meeting is of opinion that the Panchama Members now representing the Community on the Madras Legislative Council being all nominated and not elected and belonging unfortunately to only one section of the Community do not represent the views of the Community in general and it is consequently immature to consider the resolution at this stage.
6. That this meeting resolves that as the Adi Dravida signifies the original tribes, such as Todas, Cherumas, etc and as according to the eminent writers, such as Dr. Gustav Oppert, Bishop Caldwell, Justice Ramanthamby and others that Panchamas are Dravidians, the name 'Dravida' should be used to designate the Panchamas exclusively as distinct from the Caste Dravidas, who are non-brahmin Hindus and who have their own caste appellations.
7. This Meeting also resolves that Copies of the above resolutions be sent to His Excellency the Governor, the President, the secretary, and the members of the Madras Legislative Council.

By order

R. T. Ramakrishna Pillay,
Secretary,

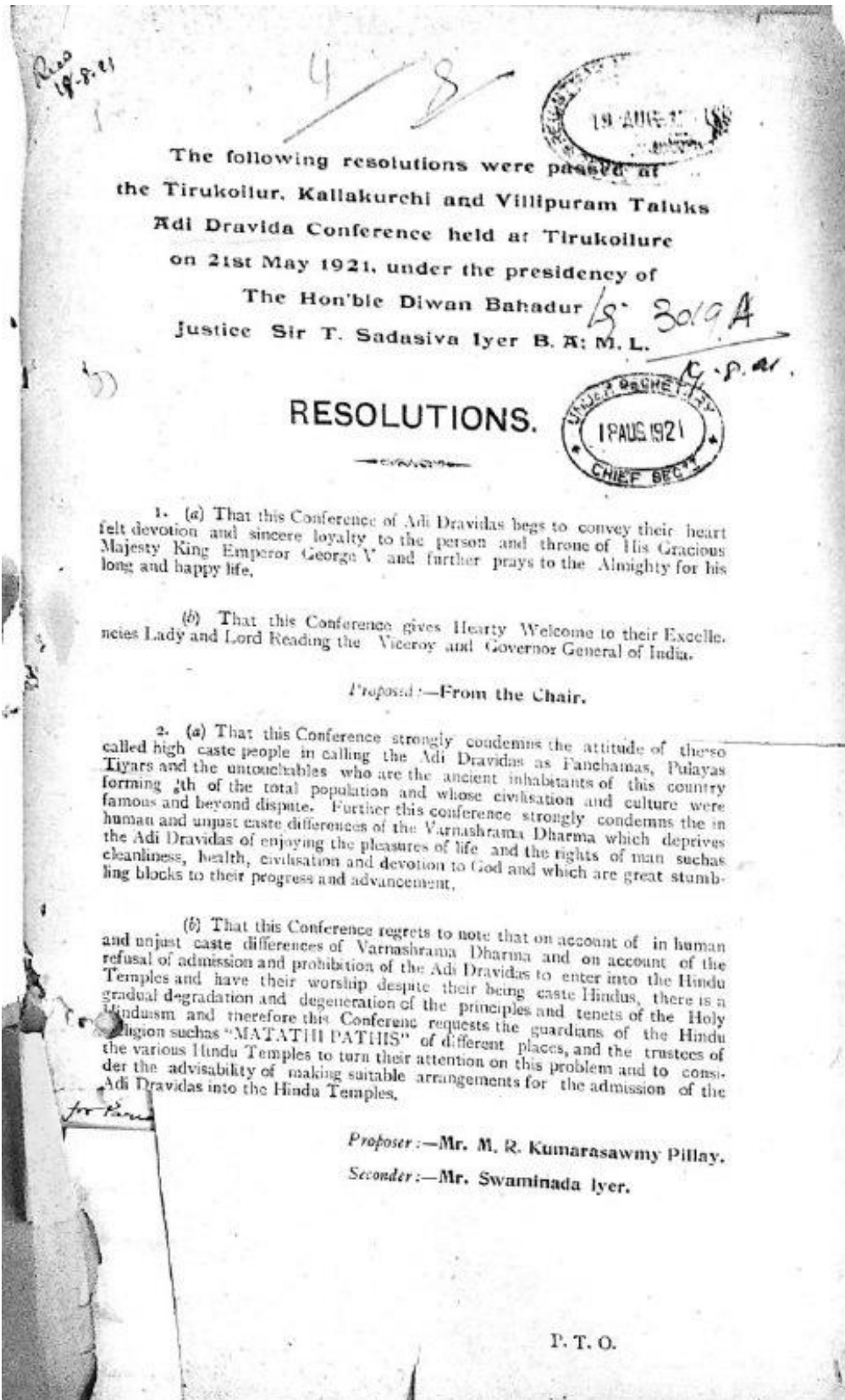
DRAVIDA MAHAJANA SABHA

24th July 1921 }
Madras. }

The Radisill Press, Royapettah.

APPENDIX IV

Resolutions Passed in the Adi-Dravida Conference held
at Tirukoilure on 21.05.1921



3. That this Conference regrets to note the non-compliance of the Government to the request of the Adi Dravidas to appoint a Commissioner of Labour for South Arcot District where the Adi Dravida populations is the largest and where the Adi Dravidas are labouring under innumerable difficulties although their position is not equal to that of the Tanjore Adi Dravidas in spite of the fact that ever since 1917 in 6 Conferences resolutions have been passed requesting the Government to appoint an Assistant Commissioner of Labour to redress their grievances and to look after their interests.

Proposer.—Swami Sahajananda.
Secunder.—Rev. Benjamin.

4. That this Conference requests the Government to enact a special Labour Legislation for the benefit of the Agricultural labourers on the lines of the Factory Legislation.

Proposed:—From the Chair.

5. That this Conference requests the benign British Government to enact a special legislation to penalise and punish all those people who prevent the Adi Dravidas from making use of the Public Roads, Public Wells and Tanks, Railways etc., ~~and~~ by enabling the Adi Dravidas to exercise their rights and privileges of citizenship.

Proposed:—From the Chair.

6. That this Conference enjoins on all Adi Dravidas to abstain from Drink and Gambling.

Proposer:—Mr. A. M. Shanmugam.
Secunder:—Mr. P. L. Perumal Nayanar.

7. That this conference requests the Chairman to communicate the above Resolutions to the Government.

Proposer:—Mr. Veerabadra Nayanar.
Secunder:—Mr. Narayana Samban.

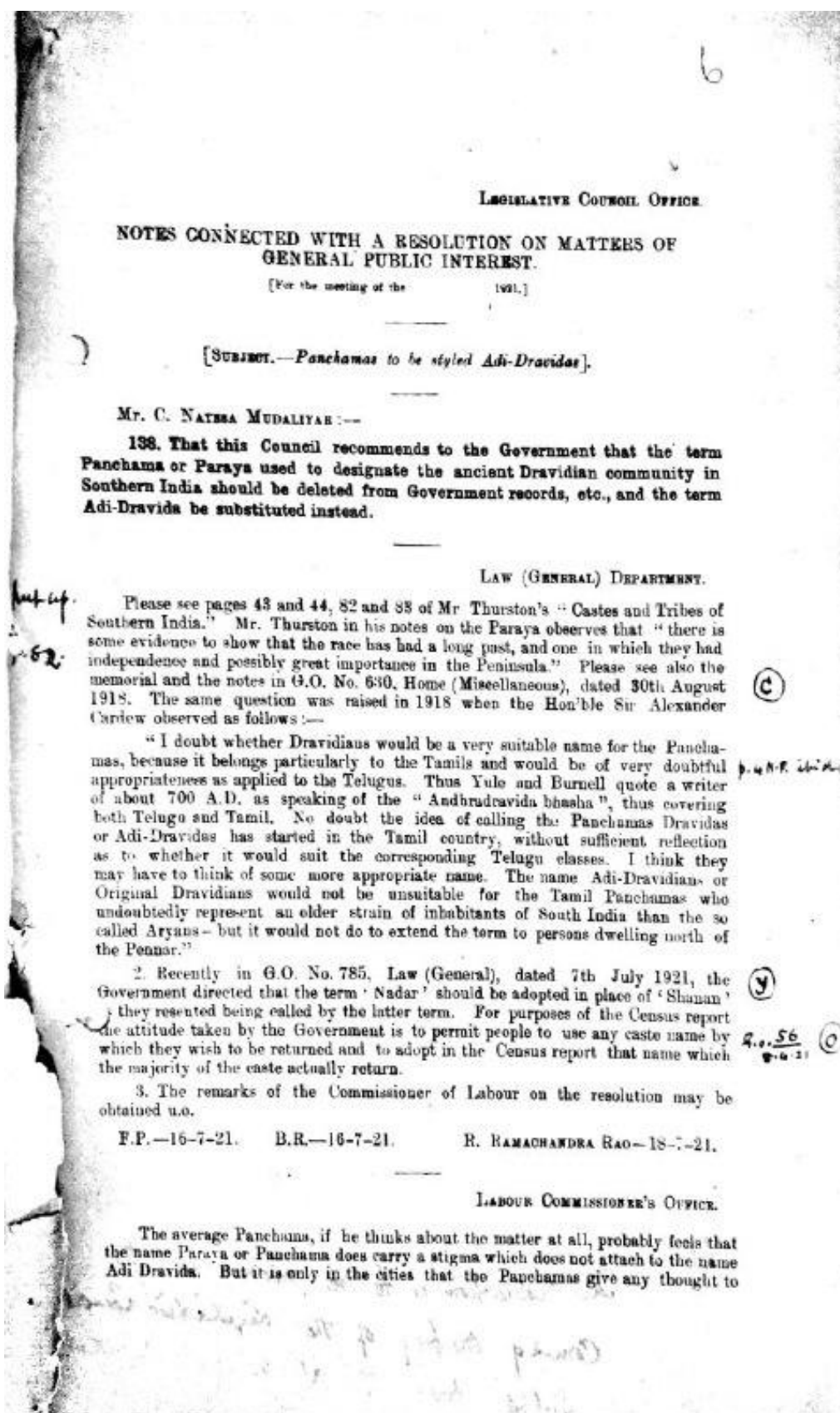
In his concluding remarks the President, Sri Justice T. Sadasivai, B.A. M.L., J.S. said that Thirukulathar and Vandanaar Kulathar are also good appellations for Pariah and Parahams, but he said, the ~~low~~ Saivites among you may not agree to accept the name Thirukulathar to the Community though that name was given to them by Sri Ramanujachariar and the Varkshnavas among you may not agree to accept the name Vandanaar Kulathar as Vandana is a Saiva Saint. The Christians among you may not agree to both the names as they are connected with Hindu Religion. Considering all these difficulties, the learned Judge said that the name Adi Dravida is not ill-suited to the Community though the Southern and Mahratta Brahmans are called also Dravidas. "It appears to me", he added, "that Samanyas (Casteless) may with advantage be preferred and the name for adoption maybe "Samanyas" for the whole community and "Dravida Samanyas" for your Community in the South."

(True Copy)

Forwarded to the Secy to the Governor in Council (the Government) for information.
Camp Madurai
17 August 1923.
H. Adaswari.

APPENDIX - V

The Legislative Council's Recommendation to the Government Regarding the Usage of the Term 'Adi-Dravida'



the matter. The term Panchama once acquiesced in has fallen into disfavour as indicating inferiority in the same way as Vaisya or Sudra has been discarded by the non-Brahmans. No mere change of name will however accelerate the uplift of the community or help them to rise in the estimation of their more fortunate brethren.

As regards the choice of new name not only is there the difficulty about the Telugu Panchamas referred to by Sir Alexander Cardew, but there is the further difficulty that the Panchamas of Southern India are not agreed among themselves whether the name should be "Dravida" or "Adi-Dravida." The name "Panchama" is still largely used among themselves and there is at present no other convenient general term. "Depressed classes" is too vague. Their ultimate designation is entirely a matter for the community itself and should be left to it. The individual has a perfect right to use any of these terms at his discretion and no resolution of the Council could bind him.

T. K. MOIR—26-7-21.

LAW (GENERAL) DEPARTMENT.

The case may now be submitted to C-3.

2. Orders are requested as to—

- (1) whether C-3 will reply to the resolution;
- (2) whether he desires further information to be collected; and
- (3) whether the matter should be discussed in Council.

B.R.—26-7-21.

R. V. KRISHNA AYYAR—26-7-21.

Adi-Dravida is a name unknown to the vast majority of the community proposed to be thus named. If it is adopted, in course of time it will gather to itself the same significance as the word Paraya unless the community improves its status in the meantime.

P. C. DUTT—26-7-21.

- (1) I shall take charge of the resolution;
- (2) no further information wanted; and
- (3) no need to discuss in Council.

K. S[RINIVASA AYYANGAR]—27-7-21.

From the President, Dravida Mahajana Sabha, dated the 7th September 1921.

The resolution relating to the substitution of the term Adi-Dravida for Panchamas or Parayas has not yet been moved. The * protest resolutions now received from the Dravida Mahajana Sabha may be added on to the file and submitted to C-3 in due course.

* Not printed.

F.P.—11-8-21. B.R.—11-8-21.

R.V.K.—12-8-21.

From Sir T. Sadasiva Ayyar, Kt., dated the 17th August 1921.

Certain * resolutions passed at a conference of the Adi-Dravidas at Tirukoilur have been received and added to the current file. Attention is drawn to the remarks of the President of the conference—Sir T. Sadasiva Ayyar. The case may be circulated to C-3.

* Not printed.

F.P.—31-8-21. B.R.—31-8-21.

R.V.K.—31-8-21.

P.C.D.—31-8-21.

K. S[RINIVASA AYYANGAR]—31-8-21.

As:
This resolution is to be moved in the
Coming meeting of the Legislative Council.
Subtd. that the file may be circulated
to C-3.

V

RESOLUTIONS ON MATTERS OF GENERAL PUBLIC INTEREST.

The following resolutions standing in the names of Mr. C. Natesa Mudaliyar and Mr. M. R. Seturatnam Ayyar were deemed to have been withdrawn, one honourable member not being in his place and the other honourable member not having moved the resolution.

Substitution of "Adi Dravida" for "Panchama" or "Paraya."

MR. C. NATESA MUDALIYAR :—

"138.—*That this Council recommends to the Government that the terms 'Panchama' or 'Paraya' used to designate the ancient Dravidian community in Southern India should be deleted from Government records, etc., and the term 'Adi-Dravida' be substituted instead.*"

APPENDIX VI

Recommendation of the Legislative Council to the Government for the Abolition of the Office of the Labour Commissioner

This resolution is *Subd to C₄.* *2*
to be withdrawn
as there are other resolutions
in labour department. It may be useful if the office can
be put up a note on the different conditions / the
department will be, what are the factors, the d-
the need to be taken
to be taken

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OFFICE
 ii Labour problem
 iii Depressed classes
 iv Tribal problems
 No need to be taken

NOTES CONNECTED WITH A RESOLUTION ON MATTERS OF GENERAL PUBLIC INTEREST.

[SUBJECT: Abolition of the office of Labour Commissioner.]
 17 MAR 1921

M. R. S. D. W. Babai P. KESAVA PILLAI Avargal :-
 17.3.21.

'106. That this Council recommends to the Government that the office of the Labour Commissioner be abolished from 1st of April 1921.'

LAW (LABOUR) DEPARTMENT.

The genesis of the appointment of the Commissioner of Labour and the necessity thereof are clearly set forth in letter to the Government of India No. 145 D/20-6, dated 2nd June 1920, at pages 9-16 of G.O. No. 2254, Revenue, dated 14th September 1920, to which special attention is invited. The appointment has been sanctioned for two years from 15th October 1919 (paragraph 16 of letter at page 14 *ibid*) and expires in the middle of October next. Recently a Deputy Commissioner has been appointed up to the same date for assisting the Commissioner generally. Provision has, however, been made for the whole of the next financial year and a sum of about Rs. 75,000 accordingly entered in the budget estimates for 1921-22 for the salaries of Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and two Personal Assistants. The question of the permanent constitution of the Labour Department will have to be taken up shortly.

2. It is noteworthy that Mr. Kesava Pillai is a member of the Labour Advisory Board—vide G.O. No. 1071, Revenue, dated 10th May 1920. He makes no reference to the Deputy Commissioner of Labour but his intention, doubtless, is that the Deputy Commissioner and the office staff in the Central office should be dispensed with also. The object of the resolution evidently is not to condemn special measures for the welfare of the classes for whom the Labour Department exists but to suggest that these can efficiently be conducted without a costly common central machinery and may well be entrusted to other existing agencies. The various classes of people whose interests the Commissioner has to safeguard and advance are (a) depressed classes including aboriginal and hill tribes, (b) industrial labourers, and (c) criminal tribes. It will now be examined how far it is possible to dispense with the intervention of a special officer in regard to the work done for these three classes of people.

3. *Depressed classes.*—The appointment of Commissioner of Labour took its origin mainly in the necessity that was very strongly felt for imparting continuity to the spasmodic measures undertaken for the welfare of these classes and for ensuring a long-sustained and well-directed effort in this direction. This is very forcibly stated in paragraph 9 of Board's Proceedings at page 28 of G.O. No. 748, Confidential, dated 29th March 1919, which is reproduced below for ready reference:—

"After a careful consideration of the problem of the depressed classes, the Board has come to the conclusion that, however liberal or generous may be the attitude of Government towards them and whatsoever may be the facilities created for the improvement of their condition, the effect desired is not likely to be produced so long as there is no separate agency to carry out the policy of Government in this respect. Proposals for improving the condition of these classes have in the past, from time to time, received the approval of Government, but owing to the lack of special organization of effort, they have failed of effect. There is generally indifference and often hostility to measures calculated to uplift the depressed classes and, if the Collector is not keenly interested and has not the force of will to carry such measures through, they become entirely inoperative owing to the passive obstruction or indifference of his subordinates. It is therefore essential that a special officer with a suitable staff under him should be appointed as Protector of the depressed

-2-

classes. Such an officer if properly chosen will impart continuity to all the remedial measures which Government have already sanctioned or may sanction in the future and prevent the good intentions of Government from being rendered ineffective by local indifference or opposition. It is only from a long-sustained, persistent and well-directed effort that any appreciable result can be expected in elevating these vast masses, of the population in view of their apathy, ignorance and helplessness. Further, in view of the rapid steps which are being taken to give India self-government, it is a matter of urgent necessity and mere political justice that, along with the political reforms, social reforms should be pushed more vigorously than before, so that the depressed classes may be enabled to make their voice heard in politics and that they may not be left a helpless prey to the higher classes who at present monopolize education and, with it, property and power."

Mr. Nobes (Revenue Under Secretary) then remarked that the Board of Revenue had not made out a very convincing case and that the duties to be allotted to the special officer could be carried out by existing agencies—paragraph 6 at page 7 of notes to G.O. No. 748, dated 29th March 1919. As against this, Sir Alexander Cardew observed as follows—page 9 of notes to G.O. No. 748, dated 29th March 1919:—

"The proposal to appoint such an officer to work out schemes for the improvement of the position of the depressed classes is attractive and the very fact that the position of the depressed classes at present is what it is, is a sufficient answer to the suggestion that the existing agencies are sufficient. No doubt Collectors, Taluk Boards and Educational officers could, if they had sufficient time and interest in the matter, do all that is necessary but experience going back at least as far as 1892 conclusively proves that with the immense mass of detail coming before district officers and local bodies, they have not found sufficient leisure to deal adequately with the position of the depressed classes. This fact shows that the choice really is between appointing some officer who will look specially after the business of the depressed classes and leaving matters to drift as they are at present"—with in his opinion undesirable consequences.

The establishment at present chiefly concerned with the welfare of the depressed classes consists of three Assistant Commissioners of Labour one each in the districts of Tanjore, Gōdāvāri and Chingleput. It is proposed to appoint three more shortly for the district of Kistna, Guntūr and South Arcot and the necessary provision has been made in the estimates for 1921-22. It seems very essential that the work of these officers should be co-ordinated by one central authority under the Government. In fact it has been contended on behalf of the depressed classes that the work relating to their welfare is sufficiently important and onerous to demand the appointment of a central officer solely devoted to that work—vide Mr. M. C. Raja's speech in the Legislative Council in April last. In paragraph 3 of G.O. No. 2636, Revenue, dated 3rd November 1920, reviewing the administration report of the Commissioner it has been recognized that the elevation of the depressed classes is the principal work of the department. The demand for a separate officer for the depressed classes alone has been met by the appointment of a Deputy Commissioner to assist the Commissioner generally.

It may in this connexion be mentioned that the Commissioner is at the present moment engaged in dealing with the serious situation caused by the attempt of several landlords in Madras city to oust the Panchama tenants from the sites of which they have been in occupation for a very long time and on which they have erected superstructures, in some cases of considerable value. It is hardly likely that this matter can satisfactorily be attended to in addition to their ordinary duties by any of the Government agencies in the city, e.g., the Board of Revenue or the Collector.

4. *Industrial labourers.*—Prior to the appointment of the Commissioner of Labour practically the only duties relating to labour were the control of the administration of the Factories Act, and Workmen's Breach of Contract Act and emigration of labour, labour troubles being practically unknown and even now the only executive staff (under the Commissioner) concerned with these labourers is the factories inspection staff. These matters were entrusted to the Board of Revenue (Separate Revenue) but the Member in charge had little time to devote to the work and the Board itself

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laid stress on the necessity for the appointment of a touring officer to deal with questions arising out of emigration—vide paragraphs 8 and 10-11 of letter to India at pages 12-13 of G.O. No. 2254, Revenue, dated 14th September 1920.

During the last two years labour problems have come to the forefront and demand special attention. The situation having become acute the Government in July last proposed to appoint a committee to inquire into labour conditions and devise measures for the more harmonious working of labour and capital—vide G.O. No. 1688, Revenue, dated 18th July 1920, but as the proposal had to be dropped, G.O. No. 2129, Revenue, dated 31st August 1920, the question has been referred to the Commissioner of Labour for report with the help of his Advisory Board. One of the most pressing labour problems is that of the registration and regulation of labour unions and the possibility of devising machinery for labour disputes and it is proposed to issue special reference to the Commissioner on these points.

Besides, the Government are called upon to furnish at very short notice views and information on the subjects for discussion and conclusions formulated at International labour conferences under the auspices of the League of Nations of which India is a member—vide G.Os. Nos. 2080, Revenue, dated 26th August 1920 and No. 12, Revenue, dated 31st January 1921. One such reference which was received towards the middle of January and on which reply is due before 1st April 1921 has just been reported on by the Commissioner. The Government have also been required to furnish the Government of India with full and prompt information of labour troubles as they arise in order to enable them to carry out the functions and obligations imposed by India's membership in the League of Nations and also for the information of the Secretary of State—vide their letters in G.O. No. 3049, Revenue, dated 22nd December 1920, and especially paragraphs 2 and 3 at page 1 of that Government Order.

In these circumstances it has become more than ever essential that an officer of Government should be in intimate contact with the labour situation.

5. It is probable that criticism will be specially directed towards the intervention of the Commissioner in labour disputes. Employers are apt to resent his attempts at conciliation—vide e.g., Mr. Thonger's letter in the file regarding Madras Engineering Works strike put up below e.f.—while the employees would probably welcome more active interference on their behalf. That the Commissioner has not been altogether unsuccessful in regard to this matter will be seen from a perusal of paragraph 12 of letter to India at page 13 of G.O. No. 2254, Revenue, dated 14th September 1920, and in paragraph 2 of G.O. No. 2635, Revenue, dated 3rd November 1920, the Government had occasion to congratulate Mr. Paddison on the energy, tact and skill which he has displayed in these negotiations. It is true that in regard to the recent tram strike and lock-out at the Buckingham Mills the Commissioner's efforts at conciliation proved abortive but matters must remain in an unsatisfactory state until the labour problems referred to in the previous paragraph are properly dealt with and meantime the Commissioner will have to do what little he can to promote better understanding between capital and labour by his personal influence.

6. Criminal tribes.—For the circumstances in which control over settlements was transferred to the Labour Commissioner, please see paragraph 7 of letter to India at page 12 of G.O. No. 2254, Revenue, dated 14th September 1920, and page 6 of notes to G.O. No. 3000, Judicial, dated 3rd December 1920. Briefly stated, the work was in this Presidency at first done by District Magistrates assisted by the Deputy Inspector-General, Criminal Investigation Department, who exercised general supervision and served as a co-ordinating officer. The Deputy Inspector-General, however, could not really spare the time and it was also thought that direct connexion of the police with reformatory work should be severed and that criminal tribes might appropriately be included in the category of depressed classes—vide paragraphs 2 and 4 of C.I.'s note at page 2 of Notes to G.O. No. 333-5, dated 6th February 1920. The general control and management of settlements was therefore transferred to the Labour Commissioner when such an officer was appointed for this Presidency.

It may be mentioned here that in some other provinces the conduct of this portion of the Labour Commissioner's work has by itself been considered sufficiently

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important to justify the appointment of special officers—vide paragraph 7 at page 12 of G.O. No. 2254, Revenue, dated 14th September 1920. The question of the appointment of a special officer for settlement work in this Presidency came up recently also for consideration in connexion with the recommendations of the Central Tribes Conference held at Delhi in December 1919—pages 6-7 of notes to G.O. No. 3000, dated 3rd December 1920. The Hon'ble Sir Lionel Davidson then stated that he was particularly anxious that the Labour Commissioner should retain general control and direct policy, an assistant being appointed if necessary. Mr. Moir has since stated that the Assistant Commissioner proposed for Guntur and referred to at page 2 supra is to assist him in settlement work also.

S.J.A.—4-3-21.

T.K.—5-3-21. C.V.—5-3-21.

Mr. Kesava Pillai has no case whatever. It is not apparent what he has at the back of his mind—probably it is economy. If any further information is wanted, office will collect it.

J. A. deROZARIO—5-3-21.

R. RAMACHANDRA RAO—5-3-21.

DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

It does not appear necessary to add anything more to the above notes. This may be returned u.s. to Law (Labour) Department.

U.S.P.—7-3-21.

I agree. The case of factories is hardly likely to arise and Development is concerned in nothing else.

J. M. TURING—7-3-21.

LAW (LABOUR) DEPARTMENT.

For orders whether—

- (1) Honourable Member (Law) will take charge of resolution;
- (2) he wants further information,
- (3) he wishes this to be discussed at Council only.

R.R.—8-3-21.

(1) Yes; (2) no; (3) yes.

K. S[RINIVASA AYYANGAR]—9-3-21.

APPENDIX - VII
M.C. Rajah Presidential Address at the All India Depressed Classes Leaders'
Conference, April 1926

ALL INDIA
DEPRESSED CLASSES LEADERS'
CONFERENCE

—
Madras

26th & 27th April 1926

—
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

of

M. R. Ry. Rao Bahadur

M. C. Rajah Avl. M. L. C., F. M. U

Madras.

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ALL INDIA DEPRESSED CLASSES.
LEADERS CONFERENCE: NAGPUR, 1926.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you most warmly for the honour you have done to me in asking me to preside at this conference. It is a compliment which Nagpur pays to Madras. I appreciate it very much.

Our Madras Sabha, the Madras Adi Dravida Maha Jana Sabha, was founded by no less a person than our esteemed leader M.R.Py. P.V. Subramanya Pillay of Messrs P. Venkateshallam, Madras, in the year 1895. Mr. Subramanya Pillay is the doge of our community. He has done a great deal for our people.

The few opportunities and privileges we enjoy at present are due to the efforts of our Sabha.

We welcome help from one and all; and our community is so full of admiration and gratitude to His Highness the Gaekwar of Baroda and to His Highness the Maharaja of Kolhapur in the North, the His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore and his illustrious brother His Highness the Yuvaraja and to the Maharaja of Pittapuram for the gracious favours they have bestowed upon it in its present state of gross ignorance and the callousness and despair that came of ages of ill treatment. The truly noble have never seen our enemies.

You will be interested to know that Lord Willingdon who was Governor of Madras took a paternal interest in our people and granted us very many privileges. During the time he was the Governor of Madras he afforded to us all possible protection. I am glad to say that his successor His Excellency Lord Goschen takes a personal interest in our community. We expect more from His Excellency Lord Goschen. Lord Goschen has a great good heart and noble sincerity, and naturally he bestows special consideration on the weaker children. In his case, our people feel as deeply grateful to him as it is possible for such crushed souls to feel.

On behalf of you all I extend a hearty welcome to His Excellency Lord Irvin whose advent to the position of the Viceroy of India has been hailed as an omen of auspicious significance by the Depressed Classes. We are told that His Excellency is deeply interested in agriculture

And His Excellency has fendered meritorious service in the battlefield. Since we form the main bulk of the agricultural population in India and since we are the descendants of a martial race we rely with complete faith on Lord Irwin to redress our grievances and to help us in our struggles onwards and upwards.

Conferences like these are the visible expressions of the rising self respect and self reliance and self determination of our Community which had hitherto been kept down ruthlessly by the so-called higher castes brahman as well as non brahman. The very fact that we are here assembled from all parts of India is in itself evidence of the great importance of this Conference to the Depressed Classes. The history of human society shows that the earliest and most universal form of economic structure was an organisation in which common and equal participation of the means of life was an essential factor. As the so called "Civilization" developed, a few appropriated the products of joint labour and not only deigned over the many but became also agents for enslaving and exploiting other members of the community. There is nothing brand new under the sun and it would be idle to pretend that conditions in India are sui generis or that the present day diversity of class interests and prevalence of disruptive forces in India are due to the other causes than the selfishness and the pride of wealth and the arrogance of the early usurpers and schemers. The peculiarity in the case of India does not therefore consist in the existence as such of a submerged class but rather in the means employed to keep that class permanently under the blockade set up by the usurpers of power and influence. In India alone do we find the spectacle of almsiveness in the orbit of social, economic and cultural activities receiving the sanction of religion. When we consider how in modern India religion both on the objective and on the subjective sides far from being able to initiate any movement for the good of society stands in the way of progress and the correction of abuses, can we wish for the perpetuation or continuance of the present day condition of affairs. The fact of the matter is that in India social culture has been mistaken for and identified with religious tenets. The only method that will succeed in effecting the necessary reform is to divest religion of its authority over the social life of the people. This done, equality of all men and of all communities will follow only if the privileged classes are either liberal minded enough to alter their principles of conduct and manifest purity in their public life and sympathy and justice towards all their unfortunate brethren or are compelled to change their outlook by the revolutionary upheaval of our own community. The latter alternative we undoubtedly and unequivocally deprecate for the present.

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We are passing through very distressing times and we would do well to meet oftener to discuss our affairs (and our affairs are one long tale of miseries and woes) to take counsel together, to agree upon some policy, and then take united action. If we do not do it for ourselves nobody else will do it for us. We never had any faith in our countrymen at any time. We are so many doomed victims led by them to the sacrifice, and we are going patiently to resign ourselves to our fate? That is the question we are met here to answer today. This is not the first conference where we meet to give a list of our grievances, and beg, and eternally beg the Government, to redress them, and I do not know how many more we are going to have to narrate our harrowing tale and beg again, and yet again, of the Government to remove them, without their ever inclining their ears to us; but all the same let us cry and cry together; though it may be a cry in the wilderness, let us not cease to cry; if it is true that there is a god above, however unjust man may be to us, will He not some time lend an ear to us, take pity on us?

I am tired of telling the story of our wrongs; it has been told a thousand times already both on platform and in the press. A few sympathetic listeners and readers are moved for the time, and then go home take their supper, go to bed, and forget all about it. And after all why should they not. The suffering is not theirs; they are well fed, well clothed and well pampered.

The curse of Caste fell on us with the advent of the Aryans. We were the original inhabitants of the soil; the Dravidian shared with us that honour. But when the Aryan tried to impose on us his civilization those of us who resisted the attempt, were treated as outcasts; those that were willing to sacrifice their honour were taken in and put under the class now going by the name of Non Brahmins. Those men are as much Depressed Classes as we are; they were given one name we were given another: they called them the Fourth Class; they called us the Fifth Class; they called them Sudras; they called us Pariah; there was absolutely nothing in the name beyond the fact that men in a later day began to affix a bad significance to the term, there was nothing intrinsically wrong or deprecatory in it. And the wily Aryan gave certain privileges to the Sudras. And they deprived us of the common and universal rights of humanity; we were to be treated not as men, not as animals, but as ~~some~~ something worse than beasts; we were not to walk on the same roads with them, breathe the same air with them, drink the same water with them or light the same fire with them; we were to be segregated; we were

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given a living wage. From being Kings, Emperors, and Ministers for having taken up arms against a foreign invader, and then when defeated, for refusing to embrace his civilization, that punishment, the like of which is unknown in the history of any other part of the world was imposed on us, and that was to be perpetual, not only those that revolted then, but their descendants and the descendants descendants were to suffer for ever and ever. The Inquisition, the atrocities committed by barbarians, in their inroads on Rome, the sufferings of the heretic in the Netherlands, the enormities of Nero, the cruelties perpetrated by Tamerlane and Chenshizkhan, these pale before the horrors of caste. And so, under these circumstances have we grown up during the past probably 1000 years. Without the cheerful light of the Sun, and still more beneficent light of knowledge shut out from the commonest blessings that man enjoys with the beast, forced to work and sweat for other men— the so called caste Hindu without food to eat, without clothes to cover our nakedness, or protect us from the inclemencies of the weather, without even good water to drink without fresh air to breathe, it appears to me most surprising how we have managed to survive all these years. But over and above man is a God whatever the caste Hindu in the superciliousness of his power and wealth may say; and the laws that regulate the affairs of the world are not man's but God's. Let him therefore beware. Even the limit of God's patience can be reached; and the laws that regulate the affairs of the world are not man's but God's. Let him therefore beware. Even the limit of God's patience can be reached and then what shall I say repentance may be too late: death-bed repentance reaches to no restitution. The Almighty in His wrath, might strike down this generation of vipers and sweep them from the earth as so much vermin unfit to inhabit God's world. Let the caste Hindu bethink himself before it is too late. The idea of Karma which he craftily introduced and into which prison he made us enter and then turned the key, is already disappearing before the powerful dissolvent of modern thought and intellectual curiosity. We are beginning to feel our pulse quickening, we see our perfect equality with the caste Hindu. When that is so are we going to put up with the injuries and insults that are being heaped upon us every day? And let me say the man will have to pay dearly, very dearly who still continues to think that he has some superiority over us, in having been born as a caste Hindu and in the insolence of that thought either insults us or injures us.

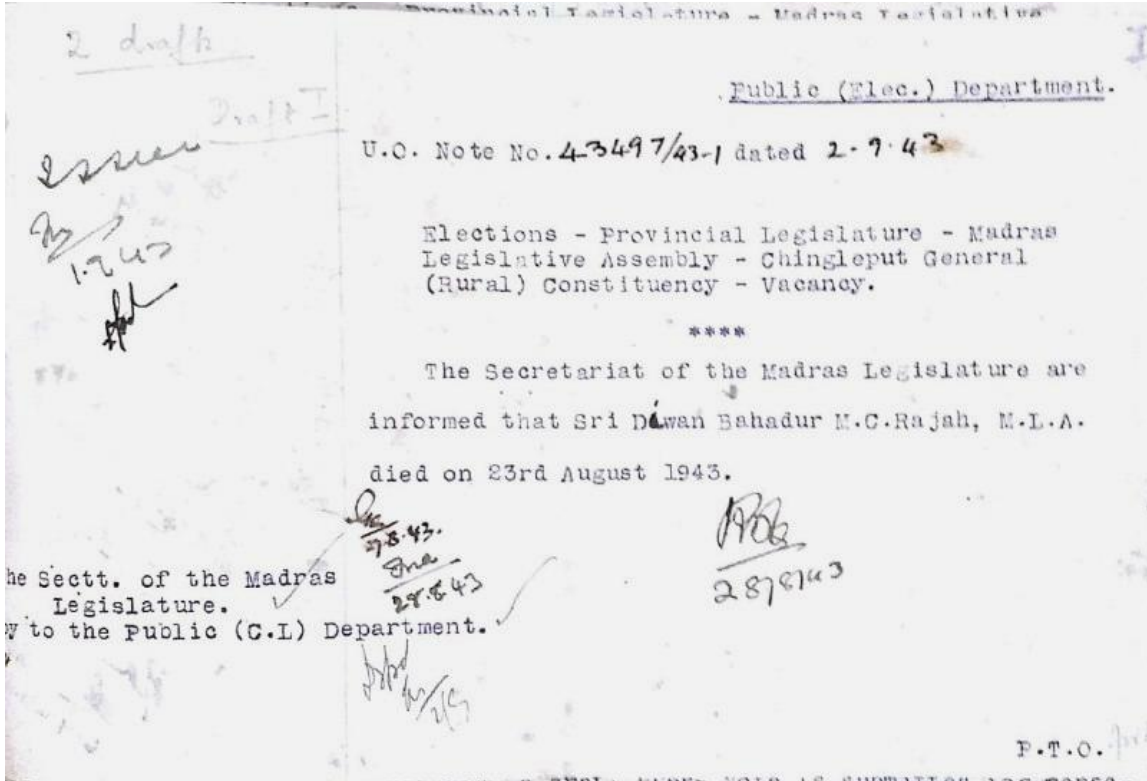
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Gentlemen, now there is a point that bewilders me most and for which as try I may I can find no solution or even an explanation. The Britisher has been here for over a century and yet has allowed this state of things to go on. A whole population is being ground down under a mountain load; he hears the groans the groan of men, whose blood is being shed by the drop, whose flesh is being cut away by the inch, and whose bones are being ground down slowly, slowly because it is the lingering torment of us all in which the caste Hindu takes a fiendish delight, which moves him to a nasty chuckling merriment— I say we are slowly crushed; you cannot say that the Britisher is either deaf or blind; all these are evident to him and yet why has he not raised his fingers against this abomination "which stands out a foul blot upon the face of oration, an offence to christendom and mankind". It looks apparently hard of explanation but nothing is easier to answer. He says, The very fact of our being a foreigner tells against us; this is a social evil social tyranny, however grinding and cruel it may be; if it was only political nothing should deter us from setting the matter to rights forth with; no doubt we are daily witnesses of the wrongs and the sufferings and your anguish; but we are helpless; we have sworn when we entered India not to meddle with your social fabric, however dilapidated or rotten it may be. If a few spirited and determined ones amongst us, with a view to help ourselves, seeing that not even the Britisher lends us any assistance, bleed bloodily break through the social cordon, just to assert our right the District Collector or the Sub Collector who has a posse of Caste Hindu officials as advisors—of the place immediately proclaims we are breaking the peace, and backed up by all that huge machinery of Government issues orders under section 144 Indian Penal Code and calls and calls upon us to desist; and says he you have the courts, where, if you file a suit, the authorities will look very carefully into the claims and counter claims, rights and counter rights".

How advice looks perfectly sound, and would be so if offered to any other community but the Adi Dravida. Why in the first instance we have not the money that would enable us to go to a court of law. As I said a little while ago, famished and half naked as we are, where are we to find the money to file a suit in a law court? Is not the Government aware of it? The question of money apart, what are the odds if we do somehow miraculously manage to find the money and successfully file a suit? In a caste Hindu court, presided over by a Hindu Judge upon a Hindu cause, with a Hindu Jury, what is an Adi Dravida to hope for?

APPENDIX - VIII

Government Notification for By-election in Chingleput
Due to the Death of Mr. M.C. Rajah



21/2
1/8

Notes

Public (Elections) Department.

Elections - Provincial Legislature - Madras Legislative Assembly - Death of Sri Dewan Bahadur M.C.Rajah.

report from
of Chingleput
12-17

Please see the Press report on p.l.C.F. of the death of Sri Dewan Bahadur M.C.Rajah, who represented the Chingleput General (Rural) Constituency in the seat reserved for the Scheduled Classes in the Madras Legislative Assembly. The death of the M.L.A. may be intimated to the Secretariat of the Madras Legislature. A draft u.o. Note is submitted for approval

2. Under rule 9(1) of the Assembly Conduct of Elections Rules when the seat of a member becomes vacant, the Governor should call upon the constituency concerned to elect a person to fill the vacancy. But owing to the suspension of the constitution, by-elections to the constituencies of the Madras Legislative Assembly and Council are not being held for the present. No by-election need be held in the present case also.

Subject to orders, a draft Press Note is submitted for consideration.



draft II

28/9/43

The draft Press Note may be approved
Ade 28/9/43 CS

29/9/43 HE AH 1/1/43

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[Based on U.O. Note No. 43497/43-1, Public (Elec) dt. 2-9-43] p. 7 C.F.
of Press Note No 134 dt. 4-9-43] p. 8 C.F.

The papers may be recorded in a G.O. and
a call book entry made against 1-10-43.

By
6-9-43
for
6-9-43

MS
579 MO

G.O. No. 2553 dt. 7/9/43
Ms.

Electors - Prof. Leg
Madras Legislative As
- Chingleput General
(Rural) constituency -
Vacancy caused by death
of Dewan Bahadur M
Rajah - By-election
not to be held at
present - Papers received