

EVOLUTION OF DALIT POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN KERALA AND TAMILNADU

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Abstract

Dalit movements started as a form of revolution in order to voice out for their right in the society. People fight for a cause and that turns into a movement and sometimes it is the movements which bring people together to fight against the atrocities. Likewise, Dalit movement started in the early 80's by Bakthi saints and it gained its momentum with giants like Buddha, Phule and Ambedkar. Before getting into the Dalit movements the scholar attempts to trace who are Dalits? What is their position in the society? What is Dalit literature? By doing so the evolution of Dalits, their place in the society, impact of the state wise Dalit movement and what are the changes it brought to the society through literature and movement will be traced. In this paper the scholar will attempt to trace the evolution of the Dalit movement in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Dalit; movement; Kerala; Tamil Nadu.

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1. KERALA LIBERATION MOVEMENT (KERALA)

The eminent activist like Ayyankali, Pokayil Yohannan Narayana Guru and pampady John Joseph had a polemical role to liberate the Dalits of Kerala. At present Kerala excels in literacy and socio economic power but long back it struggled under the oppression of Namboodris and Nayars. Long back the Ezhava communities termed as OBC were considered to be the untouchables they faced several sufferings and depression and considered as polluted people. They were not allowed to get into the temples, bridges and into upper caste house their women were not allowed to wear upper garments and they have to serve the high caste people. They should not have umbrella, ornaments, good clothes, and slippers. The upper caste people were placed in government job and had good education but the lower caste people were in the field of agriculture, farmer, weaving, toddy –tapping, and carpentry. In 1885 Dr. Palpu who is the first Ezhuva graduate was not allowed to work in the government jobs he created a protest signed by 13,176 Ezhavas and gave it to the Travancore ruler but it didn't work out. It was at the time Narayana Guru (1854- 1928) an activist intensified the issue and fought for liberation. He created a new history by multiplying the debrahminised temple, school, and various other institutions for the people.

On 10th February 1888 he picked a stone and named as lord Shiva in Aruvipuram when the Brahmins got to know this they opposed him for doing such irrespective things without considering an auspicious day for worship, for which Guru answered them that it is the Shiva of Ezhavas not the temple of Brahmins. After that many temple were created by him and the lower caste people were allowed to enter the temple. His wit had no limits he had greater compassion towards the fellow beings and he stated that “One Caste, One Religion and One God for Man” (B.R.Mani 302) As Guru felt that within the temple many ancillary works has to be done as the offering given by the devotees should be helpful for providing education, weaving and technical centers and learning English with Malayalam should be followed as it will widen the job opportunity and he even encouraged women's education and felt that educational institutions are the real temple to bring out a change in the society and stated “ Educate that you may be free, and organise that you may be strong” (B.R. Mani 303) Guru was a great lover of Sanskrit and vedantic studies and he promoted a egalitarian socio- cultural set up in the society.

C.V.Cunhuraman (1871-1969) is a supreme rationalist and refused to accept until it intellectually convinced him.

K.Ayyappan (1889-1969) is a radical person who changed Narayana Guru's slogan as "No Caste, No Religion, and No God for Mankind" (B.R.Mani 304) T.K. Madhavan (1886-1930) fought for rights and dignity for the untouchables. To reach large masses Guru set an organization called the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam SNDP in 1903 for the empowerment of oppressed communities. Every year annual conference was held and people gather in an enormous number, women were also participating in it and in 1905 industrial exhibition were conducted. Palpu and Kumaran Asan played a leading role and they fought for the rights to enter the Ezhuva children in public schools that created a rift between the Ezhuvass and Nayars.

The SNDP took a shape of popular movement and Narayana Guru asked the community people to quit drinking and doing all menial jobs instead to gain education and to go out and earn for their own living in industries. Vocational training was given to the students of the SNDP organization. The executive secretary of SNDP Asan created a patriotic and dignified feeling to upright his caste men through writing revolutionary poems. He wrote on inter-caste marriage, religion, slavery and patriotism. He felt that Buddha and Buddhism will be the role model for their caste people. His work *Duravastha* (The Deplorable condition), *Chandalabhikshuki* (The Untouchable Nun), *Karuna* (The Compassion) are anchored in Buddhist narratives. Edwin Arnold's work on Buddha as *The Light of Asia* was translated by him into Malayalam as *Sri Buddha Charitam*. Many of the SNDP organization followers felt that Guru should start a new religion which supports the untouchables as Buddhism or to enter as a mass into Buddhism yet some followers suggested Christianity. Sugatan started a Buddhist mission to spread Buddhism in Allepy.

Krishnan wrote the book *The light of Buddhist Teaching* (1929) in which he interprets Buddhism in a rational and ethical way. 1920's and 30's lead to a rationalist and socialist struggle and it lead to a meeting in 1925 at Advait Ashram in Alwaye and with the leadership of Guru Malayalam magazine *Yuktivadi* (The Rationalist) with K.Ayyapan as its editor was started. In

1930 a movement called Swatantra Samudayam (Independent Community) which fought for the establishment of the egalitarian society and abolition of religion and caste was started.

K.Ayyapan's organization Sahodara Sangham (The Association of Brotherhood) by burying the effigy of a monster of caste they celebrated its first anniversary. He encouraged intercaste marriage and interdining but he was opposed by many Narayana Guru gave support to his activism and he states that "Whatever be the religion, language, custom, caste or dress of individuals, since they are all human beings, there can be no objection to their interdining and intermarrying" (B.R.Mani 310) Congress nationalist movement gained strength in 1920's Ayyapan questioned Gandhi for his silence when the Hindus treated the untouchable as he only gave voice for the British people but not for the fellow Indian within the country. Bhikhu Parekh indicated Ambedkars criticism of Gandhi as "Gandhi: Undetermined the moral basis of untouchability but not its economical and political roots" (From Untouchable to Dalits Pg 12). Gandhi made the educational experiment of the Dalits by mobilizing all the sections of the society against British but 'The Harijan Welfare' programme did not convince Ambedkar so he started the 'Dalit Democratic Movement' Later Ambedkars followers lead a battle to abolish the Gandhi's term of Harijan in all government pronouncements of Madhya Pradesh and Maharastra. To fight against the event of theendal (untouchable) in 1918 of October the Passive Resistance league was established in Kozhikode and T.K Madhavan at Kakinada Congress Conference in 1923 passed the temple entry resolution. He led the Vaikom satyagraha from the front but Narayana Guru was disappointed that Gandhi's varnasharma dharma was unshakable till the last. Ayyankali an illiterate Dalit was not philosophical but his movement was humanistic and democratic he focused mainly on economic issues than socio-cultural aspect. He established a open school in Vengannoor in 1904. Caste hindus opposed him and he created a protest with a small group known as "Ayyankali Pada". In 1907 he started Sadhu Jana Paripalan Sangham it started vocational training centre for all the communities and it lead to modern education movement.

In 1907 Ayyankali fought for the right to education and he took two dalits girls to school and he gained more opposition from the Hindus. So he made the farmers and the agricultural labours not to work for the landlords until the right to education is met. He led the first strike of agricultural

labours in Kerala from 1907-1908. Ayyankali was nominated as the member of pre-independence Travancore Legislative Assembly. He never visited Padmanatha Swamy temple in Kerala which was near his house as the liberation of the dalits is not only in the temple entry proclamations so he refused to step into the temple. PoiKayil yohanna (1879-1939) found the Dalit Christian movement. Narayana Guru and his followers created a new history in Kerala with their radical approach for the abolition of slavery and bringing in the power of education into the society of the untouchable created a great change in the society.

2. DRAVADIAN MOVEMENT JUSTICE PARTY (TAMILNADU)

In the 19th century an attempt by the lower caste to gain their equality emerged. Iyothee Thass a Dalit philosopher and who was Buddhist by conviction campaigned for the right to education (1845-1914) evoked the non-brahmin movement in Tamilnadu. He was the first to interpret Tamil history tradition and literature from the view of Buddhism. He was the pioneer of the neo-buddhism in India in 1910 in Madras he found the South Indian Buddhist Association. He held the campaign for the education purpose for untouchables and constructed several schools for inculcating education. He wrote pamphlets and he stated a weekly Tamizhan in it he published about the caste hegemony, conversion, untouchability and indiginious medicines. His writing gives a new insight on Buddhism, rationalism and Dravidian identity. Ravi Kumar, a Dalit activist recorded the experience of Iyothee Thass expertise in Tamil literature, Siddha, Philosophy, English, Sanskrit and pali. Advaidananda Sabha was established by Iyothee Thass in 1876. In 1885 he and Rev.John Rathinam launched a magazine Dravida Pandian. In 1886 he announced that the so called Untouchables are not Hindus and established the Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891. Ravi Kumar states that Iyothee Thassa started a weekly named 'Tamilan' in 1907 and he published articles in that weekly till his demise in 1914. The South Indian Liberal Federation known as the Justice Party was formed in 1916. Thyagaraya Chetty and T.M.Nair played an important role in Shudra movement most of the Brahmin were literate and they occupied all the positions. In 1914 among the 450 of the 650 candidates in Madras University were Brahmins. In 1920 Justice party won the election to have a diarchic government in the Madras presidency, in 1921 of 16th September it released an order to increase the proportion of non-brahmin seats in government jobs it was the first order to remove the monopolization of the government post by the Brahmins.

Justice party brought about change in the society by abolishing devadasi system, opening temples for depressed people, reduction in fee for the weaker section, education for women, basic primary education for the kids, industrial education and agricultural education. In 1925 in municipalities free and compulsory free education was given keeping the law of the education act 1920 to reduce the dropout rate of the school going kids. The Adi-dravida was given concession in fee and was given food to and if a kid leaves the school in between the parents was supposed to pay a penalty fearing it the children were allowed to learn education as it would up lift their family. Justice party helped for the abolition of illiteracy and providing government jobs for the lower caste people in the society. Tables and Figures are presented center, as shown below and cited in the manuscript.

3. PERIYAR AND SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT

Periyar means great man as he has done heroic struggles for the development of women freedom and questioned the traditional blind ways of brahminism. E.V.Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973) a prominent figure of Tamil Nadu joined Congress in 1919. He was not happy with the hypocritical politics. In 1917 he joined the Madras Presidency Association or MPA later into the congress in 1920 and served its president from 1920-24 and its secretary from 1921-22 and he broke ranks with congress in November 1925. In kancheepuram conference of Tamilnadu congress he stated “ no god, no religion, no Gandhi, no congress and no Brahmins” (N.S.S. Pandiyan pg 191). As M.K.Gandhi openly declared on his visit to south india in 1927 that “Varnashrama Dharma is not an unmitigated evil but it is one of the foundations on which Hinduism is built and it defines man’s mission on earth... Brahmins are the finest flowers of Hinduism and humanity... I will drop nothing to wither it. I know that it is well able to take care of itself. It has weathered many a storm before now. Only let it not be said of non-brahmins that they attempted to rob the flower of its fragrance and luster...” Brahmin and Non-Brahmin pg 191). He left congress and started Self-Respect movement which had the similar ignited spark of Jothibai Phule’s the Self-Respect League in 1926. EVR stated that “Though we Indians have lost much by being the slaves of the British, we have also profited at least a little and realized ourselves as human beings. If we have remained the slaves of north Indians, we would have continued as “Sudran”, “rakshashan”, “chandalan”, “assuran”, “kundakan”, “kolakan”,

“pratilokan”, “narakaran”...” (N.S.S Pandiyan pg 192) He opposed the brahminical hegemony and he fought to liberate the women and the untouchable. He questioned the dining made separate for Brahmin and non-brahmin students in a school he questioned the nationalist that “the gurukulam must stand for an ideal- for Indian nationalism- and there should be no invidious distinction between man and man” (B.R.Mani 321) He discriminated the varnashrama dharma and caste based discrimination based on birth. In an separate 26th provincial session of non-brahmins in Tirunelveli he made a resolution for the reservation of the post for the non-brahmins but Srinivasa Iyengar the president of congress didn't not allow it to be taken in open session again in 1924 on a provincial meet in Tiruvanamalai Periyar demanded for reservation for weaker section even in 1925 in Kanchipuram he fought for it as it was not accepted by the elites of the congress Periyar walked out of congress.

In 1928 along with the Justice party supporting S.Muthiah Muralidar cabinet issued government order to give reservation for all the communities. The GO was passed on 27th December 1929 leading to the reservation of the weaker section of the people. The basic aim of Self-Respect movement is to free the non-Brahmins from the slavery of casteism from the Hindus. “From Phule, to Periyar the abolition of untouchability ‘required nothing more or less than the abolition of the caste system itself” (B.R.Mani 324) The Justice party felt to abolish the atrocities of the Brahmins in the public sphere and the Self-Respect movement fought for the castles egalitarian and rational society. Periyar want to pull out the root of Brahminism as it spoilt the humanity in the name of religion and he wants the women and shudra men to be liberal. He fought for the women to gain freedom in choosing her own partner and gaining education for her to be self employed. This movement created self worth and dignity among the minds of the rural and urban youth. The non-brahmin youth gathered and they burnt the *Manusmriti*, raised voices against the epics of the hindus, threw shoes on discriminatory gods and priests and marched with a mass in the temples prohibited. The elites had their newspaper *The Hindu* but Periyar found his own journal *Kudi Arasu* to popularize the atrocity against the non-brhamins.

Though Periyar was impressed by Gandhi in the beginning he later didn't like Gandian philosophy on the issues like caste, culture and nationalism. He had clashes with Gandhi for vaikom temple agitation in 1924 and then in 1927 when opposed about inter-caste marriage and

praised the Brahmins the gap grew more among them. In Tirunalveli meeting Periyar offended Gandhi by saying that if the shudras has to follow the path of Gandhi then they will end up only being slaves to the Brahmins. Periyar joined with singaravelu and established Self-Respect Samadharma party on December 1932. It means to bring equality between men and women and to give self worth of their own and not to bend for the Brahmins. The split among Samaadharna and Self-Respect came during the election in 1934 whether to support the Justice party or the Congress as there was no other parties. Due to the difference of opinion some of the people who supported Singaravelu asked him to join Congress and there the split between them happened and it made a disaster for both of them.

Periyar assumed the leadership of the Justice party he opposed for the Congress conspiracy of Hindi to be official language of the India he therefore claimed a separate state for Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. As noted “ The Self-Respect movement ... had fallen into the hands of a gang of determinentials under the leadership of E.V.Ramaswami nayakan, M.Singaravelu Chetti, and S.Ramanathan, who are determined to propogate socialism and communism among the illetrate workers and peasents of the Tamil districts, and are steadily increasing the number of their adherents” (Brahmin and Non-Brahmin pg 193). In 1994 Dravida Kazhagam was started as soon as he returned from the prison for the agitation against the introduction of Hindi in schools he was elected as the president of the Justice Party and in 1994 he renamed the party as ‘Dravidar Kazhagam’ through this political party he criticized the atrocities till his death in 1973. On December 24-25 in 1971 he held a conference in Salem about the Superstition Eradication Conference in that Periyar criticized the blind superstitious beliefs of the Hindus made effigy and posters of the superstitious beliefs and burnt them. As periyar states that “Self-Respect and rationality were necessary allies:’I have ...broken the idols of pillayar and burnt pictures of Rama. In spite of these words and acts of mine, thousands of people throng my meetings, it only indicates that self-respect and wisdom have dawned on them” (N.S.S.Pandiyan pg 197).

The self respect movement wanted the followers to gain self-willed rationality as a means to gain control over their lives. He criticized the Manusmiriti, the Bagavat Gita and Ramayana and showed up the caste. “the Self-Respect movement thus inverted the Brahmin/nationalist construction of Sanskrit as a sign of refinement, redescribing it as a vehicle for Brahminic

Power” (N.S.S Pandiyan pg 204). Ambedkar met Periyar during that time the non-brahmin movement spread widely in mysore and the Lingayats, Muslims and Vokkaligas supported it. The Vokkaliga Association in 1906, Virashaiva Mahasabha in 1909, Adi-Dravida, Abhi-Vruddhi Sangha, Kuruba Association, Central Muslim Association and other ethnic groups joined hand and formed the Praja Mitra Mandali these associations fought for the right of the lower caste people to enter the educational and government jobs and the Miller commission implemented it and accordingly these people were able to enter into the spheres of the employment and education. The Dalits in Andhra Pradesh especially in the coastal area were influenced by the Dravidian movement.

The dalits in Tamil Nadu had their cultural identity as Adi-Dravidians, the Karnataka people identified as Adi-Karnatakas , the Telugu Malas and Madigas identified as Adi-Andhra. They claimed that they were the original indigenous people as the Vedic tradition was forcefully implemented by the aboriginals Aryans who invaded the land and made the indigenous people as slaves. Dr.K Veeramani states on the 122nd birth anniversary of Periyar on presenting the book of *Pearls of his wisdom* he remarks about the caste as Start thinking about them but don't stop there, start acting.

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