

DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE EMANICIPATION OF WOMEN DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

K. Navaz Banu

*Ph.D Scholar, Department of Historical Studies
Mother Teresa Women's University, Attuvampatti, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu*

Introduction

The Gender equality means the opportunity given to the male and female must be equal in the society. There should not any disparity among them. As human being all sections of the society have the rights to participate in the development of their societies and to achieve self - fulfillment. In order to achieve such equal partnership between men and women, male dominance and control have to be removed. Even in this modern era, gender equality is not at all accepted. Although we speak of gender inequality, it is usually women who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situated men. In order to achieve such equal partnership between men and women, male dominance and control have to be removed. The Dravidian Movement in order to establish social Justice, it also aimed to achieve gender equality. To achieve gender equality first the women must be emancipated from their unprivileged and discriminative status. So the Dravidian Movement encouraged and gave opportunity, to the women folk of the society, whenever and where ever it is possible right from the establishment of Justice Party.

The Dravidian, movement formally came into existence with the release of the Non-Brahmin Manifesto by the Justice Party in 1916 foregrounding the Brahmin, non-Brahmin binary and social Justice as the core of the political discourse then. The Justice party as the parent organisation of the Dravidian movement aimed to redress the social imbalance in the society. Prior to the Aryans there was no social division based upon the caste in the Tamil society but after their arrival, the Aryan, caste came into existence. The non-Brahmins put forward the view that the ancient egalitarian Tamil/ Dravidian society was conquered by the Aryans, who then introduced the caste system in order to rule over the indigenous population. That led to the discrimination of Suddhras and the women in the Society.

Caste Division in Tamil Nadu

When Aryans settled in the Dravidian land, they carried them their Indra- Agni cult, but they seem to have brought with them few women or none at all. They influenced the elite among the darker Dravidians, established themselves as priests and took women according to their needs. They found themselves cut off from their original stock partly by the distance and partly by the alliances they had contracted. By marrying women from the Dravidians they had to some extent modified their original type, but a certain pride of blood remained in them. When they had bred females enough to serve their purposes and to establish a distinct *jus connubii*, they closed their ranks to further intermixture of blood. When they did this, they became a caste like the castes of the present day. The old term for caste is Varna, colour, which implies purity of descent, and it is the fear of the Aryans being

merged in the Dravidians as an indistinguishable mass that led to the proscribing of exogamy.

Many outsiders were brought into within the fold of Hinduism, so long as they are willing to form themselves into new caste without interfering with the existing castes and to submit themselves to the to the spiritual authority of the Brahmins and invite them to all ceremonies and pay them. In the medieval period the rulers of the Tamil Nadu favoured more to the Brahmins which helped to the development of the caste system. In North India the Vedic theory of Varna is realized at least to the extent that we find caste claiming Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Suddhra status. In South India, there are no Kshatriyas or Vaisyas, so all castes are either Brahmin, Suddhra, or Untouchable. This potential for the cultural isolation of Brahmins, although not salient in pre modern history, became significant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The British administrators of India did not favour to weaken the power of the caste based society due to their non-interference policy in the internal affairs. It paved way for the rigid caste system in India. The exclusiveness of 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 changes without at the same time undermining their unchallenged dominance. Brahmin dominance in the political arena was paralleled by Brahmin dominance in the administrative arena and university admission.

Formation of Dravidian Movement

Main reason for the formation of the justice party was that, the non-Brahmins though they were wealthy and educated elites, the Suddhra status of them was not changed. Not only did Suddhrahood become a highly emotional issue, but the frustration, disgrace, and emotive content attached to Suddhra status became linked to the concepts "Dravidian" and "non-Brahmin," all becoming symbolically synonymous. That is, a member of the Justice party would at the same time be a Suddhra (since there were no Vaisyas or Kshatriyas), a Dravidian (meaning a speaker of a Dravidian language and a member of Dravidian race), and a non-Brahmin. Attacks on varnashrama dharma (duty according to varna, caste) were directed against its justification of Suddhra Status. The Dravidian movement work against the social injustice prevalent in the society, which includes the emancipation women.

Discrimination of Women

Due to the caste the women were discriminated, and their position started to declaim. They were denied to education, property rights, right to remarry, right to divorce. The caste system also one of the main reason for child marriage and denial of rights for the women. The Dravidian movement ideology stood against all the social evils dumped upon the women. It took step against the child marriage, polygamy, and denial of divorce, immoral traffic and devadasi system.

Women Education

In general, the educational progress of women acquired its importance in 1921, when the educational portfolio was transferred to the control of Indians under diarchy. As part of Government measures, the provincial Government in Madras implemented the process of inducing girls to take up teaching profession by offering stipends to them. As the aim of the Justice Party is to provide education to all the section of societies particularly to the unprivileged section, it took keen interest in providing education to the women, who were denied the privilege of learning.

Women Franchise

The demand for the franchise was made as early as the second decade of the 20th century by the elite women, who were conscious of their political rights and were influenced by democratic values and ideals. The government Bill published in 1919, did not enfranchise women but it empowered the Provincial Legislatures to remove the gender barrier at their discretion. The Justice Party which came to power in 1920 enacted this legislation for women. Raja of Panagal was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at that time. The first of the Madras Legislative Council was convened on 11th April 1921

The Justice party, which had the principle of establishing social justice, gave its full support for the women enfranchisement. On 1.04.1921, M. Krishnan Nayar of the Justice party moved a resolution that to give equal qualification to vote was made applicable to all women. It was seconded by Raja of Ramnad. The resolution was finally passed with a majority of thirty four votes. The women could now vote, be elected or nominated to the provincial legislatures. For the first time, in 1923, women voted both the Provincial Legislative Council and the Central Legislative Assembly. The Madras Government passed an Act in 1926 for the removal of Electoral disqualification based on gender which enabled women to contest for election or nomination to the legislature. As the Government of India granted the right to women to become member of the Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy's name was proposed the leading Justicite P.T. Rajan. Later she was also selected as Deputy Speaker to the House.

Infant Marriage and the Widowhood

By imitating the customs and practices of the Brahmins the lower classes ascend in the social ladder. Some have done so by introducing child marriage and others by prohibiting widow remarriage. The marriage of girls before puberty and the prohibition of the remarriage of widows are the direct result of the system of castes. The widow has to remain a widow for the purpose of the annual sraddha, the ceremony which assures repose to the jiva of her dead husband. According to the Hindu theory of marriage when a woman marries the husband receives from her lather or guardian the proprietorship of the woman. Therefore conformably to the rites the second marriage of a woman could not be effected in the absence of the proprietor of the woman who alone had the right to transfer his property. Behind these religious reasons lie also certain utilitarian grounds. All the families which compose a caste have a common advantage in prohibiting the remarriage of widows; these

experienced women may prove unfair competitors of young girls' who already do not find it easy to get husbands.

Child Marriage Restraint Act

A hundred years ago, gender hierarchy was extreme among Tamil Brahmins and markedly more so than among non-Brahmin groups in the region. A diacritical aspect of this hierarchy was pre-puberty marriage for girls, which in Tamil Nadu was largely confined to Brahmins. Brahmin girls received little or no education at that time. This was the position not only in old-fashioned rural families, but also in those headed by the educated, English-speaking, professional men who formed the new urban middle class of colonial Madras. In India Child Marriages were performed mostly by orthodox Brahmins who accorded religious sanctity to them. Performing post-puberty marriages were not generally accepted and offspring of such marriages were treated illegitimate. This custom practiced by the Brahmins were picked up slowly by other non-Brahmin castes also.

It was stated in a press report that "the large proportion of widows in India was partly due to the prevalence of early marriages. About one-third of all that were born died they were five years ago. Others died in youth". It was plain that a number of husbands died before their girl-wives attained puberty. When the reformers realised that their efforts to encourage widow remarriages were not rewarding they wished to arrest at least the swelling numbers of Hindu widows by discouraging child marriages.

Various measures were taken by the government of India did not improve the situation. Generally speaking the society had derived no benefit at all from any of the measures so far taken on the age of consent, because the parent of the girl who had already been married dared not refuse to send the girl to her husband's house. So a different approach to the problem of early marriages was made on February 1927, by the introduction of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill or the Sarda Bill after the name of its author, Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarda.

While the many opposition was received to the enactment of the Bill, Madras Legislative Council, the Justices recorded their full support in the favour of passing of the Sarda Act. Accordingly, a bill to prevent the child-marriages was moved on 27 March, 1928 in the Madras Legislative Council. The Justice party government, Madras Legislative Council, passed the resolution in 1928 raising the marriageable age of boys and girls to at least twenty one and sixteen years respectively, for the establishment of Social justice. The Government favoured the Sarda Bill. The Bill was passed on September, 1929 by a solid 67 and 14 against. It became an Act on 1 October, 1929. However, it came into force on 1st April, 1930.

The Self-Respect Movement

The Self Respect Movement was started by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, was concerned towards the rational thinking. The Self Respecters championed the cause of women because the self-Respecters believed that if the social restrictions to which the women had been subjected were removed they could occupy their legitimate place in society and play a dominant role in reform activities. So the Self-Respecters denounced child marriages, the

dowry system, the prohibition of widow remarriage and the Devadasi system. They upheld women's rights to property and inheritance, to divorce, to practise the modern methods of birth control and marry outside their caste group.

Resolution of Chengalpattu Conference of Self-Respect Movement

In this first conference of Self Respect Movement held at Chengalput in 1929, some resolution pertaining to the emancipation of women for establishing gender equality was put forward. They are:

1. In order to put an end to the child marriage, marriageable age of a girl should be above sixteen.
2. For selecting bride or bridegroom caste should not be the criteria.
3. To avoid the burden of the girl's parents during marriage ceremony, it was decided to that the unnecessary expenditure must be avoided.
4. Both men and women, if misunderstanding rise between them, then the couple should be given freedom to have divorce rights.
5. Widow Remarriage must be allowed in the society.
6. All the girl children must be given compulsory Primary education.
7. Property rights was emphasised to the women
8. Both men and women should be given equal Employment opportunities
9. Women teachers must be appointed especially at to the primary levels.

The independent ministry headed by P.Subbarayan enjoyed the support of Justice Party, also won the confidence of the Self- Respecters. P. Subbarayan Ministry carried out the social legislation, with full support of the elected members of the Justice party. In 1929, Subbarayan abolished the system of separate hostels for the Brahmans, the non-Brahmans and the Christian girls studying in Madras city and introduced the common hostels where caste or religion was no criterion. Likewise hostels for widows were thrown open to all communities by March 1929. Conscious efforts were made to advance social legislations for the removal of restrictions imposed on the scheduled castes in use of roads and temples maintained from public funds and the abolition of the Devadasi system.

Abolition of Devadasi System

Another social injustice which affected section women in the society was that devadasi System. E.Thurston description about the Devadasi on his Castes and Tribes of southern India was, "Dasis or Deva-dasis (handmaidens of the gods) are dancing-girls attached to the Tamil temples, whosubsist by dancing and music, and the practice of the oldest profession in the world. The Dasis were probably in the beginning the result of left-handed unions between members of two different castes, but they are now partly recruited by admissions, and even purchases, from other classes. The profession is not now held in the consideration it once enjoyed. Formerly they enjoyed a considerable social position.

In the Medieval times in an effort to promote Bhakti cult, the services of women-folk were sought after and some of them were pressed into the service of temples permanently. The men-folk were called Devaradian or Dasan and women-folk were called Devarasiyar or Dasi. From generation to generation this was their profession and a daughter of a devadasi

had to become a devadasi. Every temple of repute in South India had its troop of these women. Every day they had to attend deeparadhana in front of the deity at sunset, singing hymns in praise of the deities, dancing before the idol and follow with the processional deity carrying the holy light and by singing and dancing. For dedication, the girl before puberty had to go through several rituals in the temple. The priest would tie the tali 3 around her neck on behalf of the God. This ceremony was called as pottukattuthal.

This practice later on degenerated mainly into a life of immorality and prostitution, which in many cases became common by reason of the custom that a girl so dedicated could not opt for a valid marriage. In due course, these artist dedicated to the temples inevitably came under the category of prostitutes and were misused by the temple officials in various ways.

As the temple dedication led to the various social evils, so many social reformers felt the need to put an end to the Devadasi system. Dr.Muthulakshmi's Reddy effort to abolish the devadasi system was supported by the women of the Devadasi Community. Though she faced some opposition from the conservatives, on 4th November 1927, she put forward the motion in the Madras Legislative Council proposing that the system of dedicating girls and young women to Hindu temples for immoral purpose should be stopped. It resulted in the passing of the Hindu Religious endowment Act of 1929. But in practice it did not put to an end to the practice of prostitution and dedication of the devadasis with the lands would help them to improve their status. The act of 1029 did not put an end to the practice of prostitution and dedication of girls as devadasis. Hence Dr.MuthulakshmiReddi decided to introduce a new bill in the Legislative Council. Soon after on 24 January 1930 she introduced the bill in the legislative Council to prevent the dedication of Hindu women in temples in the Presidency of madras.

While non-Brahmins in the legislature such as C. N. MuthurangaMudaliyar and V. I. Muniswami Pillai unanimously supported Reddy's 1927 resolution and actively participated in the debates until 1947, Brahmins associated with the Congress Party such as C. Rajagopalachari and S. Satyamurti took a stance against the anti-nautch movement. Those stood against the abolition of the devadasi system justified that the devadasis were the living symbols of ancient Hindu society.

The Self -respect Movement wholeheartedly supported the Bill and declared that it would work enthusiastically for the implementation of this bill. In 1942 at the Self Respect or women's conference held at Ponnore in North Arcot district under the Presidentship of Rajalingam, among other resolutions, a resolution to remove Devadasi system in Tamil Nadu was passed. After Independence, P.Subbarayan introduced the Madras Devadasi Prevention of Dedication Bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly on 9 October 1947. The bill became the Act No. XXXIX of 1947 and came to be known as the Madras Devadasi Act. The Act prohibited the practice of dedicating girls or women to idols but also permitted Devadasis to marry.

Conclusion

The Dravidian Movement which was started to eliminate the social injustice, formed its ministry under the Montague Chelmsford reform. Justice Ministry took many legislative measures, which gave hope among the Backward and unprivileged section of the society. Justice party proved that only power can change the unprivileged status in the society, by its social legislation. Women folk of the society in general whether they belonged to the family of high social order or low social order, the discrimination forced upon them were the same. The Justice ministry focused upon the female education, women franchise, step against infant marriages and widowhood, and abolition of devadasi system. Self - Respect Movement, also propagated against the enslavement of women in the name religion, and advocated rational thinking. Dravidian Movement ideology of establishing social justice was carried out by DravidaKazhagam formed in 1944, and more women cadres took active participation in it. Emancipation of women through legislation was started the Justice Ministry was carried out by the Dravidian Parties after the independence also.

End Notes

1. NirmalaJeyaraj (ed), Women and Society A Reader in Women's Studies, ISPCK, Delhi, 2005, p.9
2. Frontline, 31.8.2018
3. Noboru Karashima,(ed), A Concise History of South India Issues and Interpretation, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.292
4. Lakshmi Narasu, A Study of Caste, Asian Educational Service, Chennai, 2003, pp.13-14
5. Ibid, p.65.
6. Marguerite Ross Barnett, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India, Princeton University Press, New Jersey,2015, p.16
7. NambiArooran, Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, Koodal Publication, Madurai, 1980,p.5
8. Marguerite Ross Barnett, op.cit, p.19
9. Marguerite Ross Barnett, op.cit, p.22
10. Jeyanthi.E, Gender Justice In India during Pre-Independence Era, MJP Publisher, Chennai, 2017,p.23
11. Neera Desai &Usha Thakkar, Women in Indian Society, National Book Trust India, 2001,p.6-7
12. Jeyanthi.E, Op.Cit, pp.26-27.
13. Proceedings of Madras Legislative Council Vol. I, Part II,1921, p.502
14. Jeyanthi.E, Op.Cit, p.27.
15. Times of India, 7.3.2018
16. NambiArooran, Op.Cit, p.66
17. Fuller.C.J, and HaripriyaNaraiman, Marriage, Education, and Employment among Tamil Brahman Women In South India, 1891-2010, Modern Asian Studies, Volumes47, Issue 1, 2013, p.55.
18. Chandrababu.B.S, Women: Her History and Struggle for Emancipation, Bharathi Puthakkalayam,2009, p.258.
19. Jagadeesan.P Marriage and Social Legislations in Tamil Nadu,Elatchiappenn Publication, 1990, p.54
20. Ibid, p.111
21. Ibid, p.113-115

22. Visswanathan.E.Sa, The Political Career of E.V.RamasamiNaicker, Ravi &Vasanth Publishers, Madras, 1983, pp. 95-96.
23. Chengaulpattu (Muthal) Tamil MahanaSuyamariyathaiMahanadu, February 17, 18,-1929, Periyar Self-Respect propaganda LTD, 2010, Chennai, pp. 137-147.
24. Ibid, p.128-129
25. Thurston.E Cates and Tribes of southern India, Government Press, Madras,1909, pp.125-126.
26. Chandra Babu.B.S, Op.Cit, p.262.
27. Venkatraman.V,Immoral Traffic -Prostitution: Indian Press on the abolition of Devadasi System in the Madras Presidency, 1927-1947, SSRN Electric Journal,2018
28. Chandra Babu.B.S, Op.Cit, p.263
29. Ibid,p.264.
30. DeveshSoneji, Unfinished Gestures Devadasi, Memory and Modernity in South India, The University of ChicacoPress,Chicago, 2012,p.129