

CONTRIBUTION OF D.M.K PARTY IN THE ANTI-HINDI IMPOSITION IN TAMILNADU – A STUDY

Dr. M. LACSMANAMOORTHY

Assistant Professor of History, Saraswathi Narayanan college, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

The Anti Hindi Agitation of Tamil Nadu was a series of agitations that happened in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras state and part of Madras Presidency) during both pre-and post- independence periods. The agitations involved several mass protests, riots, student and political movement in Tamil Nadu concerning the official status of Hindi in the state.

Political Background of Agitation

The Republic of India has hundreds of languages. During the British Raj, English was the official language. When the Indian Independence Movement gained momentum in the early part of the 20th century, efforts were under taken to make Hindustani as a common language to unite various linguistic groups against the British Government. As early as 1918 Mahatma Gandhi established the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha (Institution for the propagation of Hindi in South India).¹ In 1925, the Indian National Congress switched to Hindustani from English for conducting its proceedings. Both Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were supporters of Hindustani and Congress wanted to propagate the learning of Hindustani in non - Hindi speaking provinces of India. The idea of making Hindustani or Hindi the common language was not acceptable to Periyar, who viewed it as an attempt to make Tamils subordinate to North Indians.²

First Anti-Hindi Imposition Agitation

The first Anti-Hindi imposition agitation was launched in 1937, in opposition to the introduction of compulsory teaching of Hindi in the schools of Madras Presidency by the first Indian National Congress government led by C.Rajagopalachari. This move was immediately opposed by E. V. Ramasamy and the opposition Justice Party (Later Dravidar Kazhagam). The agitation, which lasted three years, was multifaceted and involved fasts, conferences, marches, picketing and protests. The government responded with a crackdown resulting in the death of two protesters and the arrest of 1,198 persons including women and children. Mandatory Hindi education was later withdrawn by the British Governor of Madras Lord Erskine in February 1940 after the resignation of the Congress Government in 1939.

The adoption of an official language for the Indian Republic was hotly debated issue during the framing of the Indian Constitution after the United Kingdom. After an exhaustive and divisive debate, Hindi was adopted as the official language for a period of fifteen years, after which Hindi would become the sole official language. The new constitution came into

effect on 26 January 1950. Efforts by the Indian government to make Hindi the sole official language after 1965 was not acceptable to many non - Hindi Indian states, who wanted the continued use of English. The Dravida Munnetra Kazham (DMK), a descendant of Dravida Kazhagam, led the opposition to Hindi. To allay their fears, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru enacted the Official Languages Act in 1963 to ensure the continuing use of English beyond 1965. The text of the act did not satisfy the DMK and increased their skepticism that his assurances might not be honored by future administrations.³

As the day (26 January 1965) of switching over to Hindi as sole official language approached, the Anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in Madras State with increased support from colleges students. On 25 January, a full- scale -riot broke out in the southern city of Madurai, sparked off by a minor altercation between agitating students and Congress party members. The riots spread all over Madras State, continued unabated for the next two months, and were marked by acts of violence, arisen, looting, police firing and lathi charges. The Congress Government of the Madras State, paramilitary forces to quell the agitation their involvement resulted in the death of about seventy persons (by official estimates) including two police man. To calm the situation, Indian Prime Minister Lal Bhahadur Shastri gave assurances that English would continue to be used as the official language as long as the non- Hindi speaking states wanted. The riots subsided after Shastri's assurance, as did the student agitation.

The agitations of 1965 led to major political changes in the state. DMK won the 1967 assembly election and the congress party never managed to recapture power in the state since then. The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 by the Congress Government headed by Indira Gandhi to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as official languages. This effectively ensured the current "virtual indefinite policy bilingualism" of the Indian Republic. There were also two similar agitations in 1968 and 1986 which had varying degrees of success.⁴

D.M.K Leaders versus Hindi Imposition

In this paper an attempt is made to establish, how the language issue in Tamilnadu helped Dravida Munnetra Kazham (D.M.K.) to snatch power in 1967, from Congress party. The language problem was the divisive issue in the first twenty years of Independent India, and it created the apprehension among many that, the political and cultural unity of the country was in danger. People love their language. It is an integral part of culture. Linguistic diversity would inevitably give birth to strong political currents around issues linked to language, such as educational and economic development, job and other economic opportunities and access to political power. There was no unanimity in the country to accord to Hindi, the status of the lingua franga or the national language. Particularly in Tamil Nadu people stoutly oppose the provision of the constitution in this behalf. In fact, the Tamilians have declared in no uncertain terms, that they will prefer to secede from the Indian Republic, if Hindi becomes the lingua franca, and if imposed on them against their wishes. Most agitations were spear headed by the D.M.K. criticized the stance taken by the

party on language issue and said, the D.M.K. tries to re establish its last familiarity among the people to the imposition of Hindi, the credo of the justice party and its off- shoot Dravida Kazhagam, became the politics of language for the D.M.K. in Tamil Nadu, Anti Hindi posture continues to be the credo of any political party in the quest for power through the ballot at that time.⁵

The DMK was not satisfied with the Official Languages Act, 1963 and so it started preparations for a long- drawn - out struggle against the imposition of Hindi. The DMK Executive Committee and the General Council met at Madras on 8, 9 and 10 June 1963, and resolved to appoint an agitation committee under the presidentship of Kalaignar, to draw a long - term programme of agitation. On 16 July, the agitation committee met at Arivagam, the DMK headquarters in Madras, and decided to organize regional Anti - Hindi conferences in the districts and prepare two lists of volunteer's one list that could court arrest by participating in the agitation and undergo long - term imprisonment and another list who could undergo short - term imprisonment. The Committee also decided to organize meeting, arrange concerts and stage short plays in rural areas to create awareness among the masses about the dangers of the imposition of Hindi and to organize throughout Tamil Nadu Anti - Hindi week from 15 September to 21 September, 1963.⁶

Accordingly, anti - Hindi regional conferences were held at Selam on 8 August, at Thanjavur on 25 August, and at Tirunelveli on 22 September. In a specially organized function at Theni on 23 September, Anna presented a silver sword and a shield to the President of the Anti - Hindi agitation committee Kalaignar to successfully carry on the fight against Hindi imperialism. On 5 and 6 October, the Students Anti - Hindi Special Conference was held at Tiruchy.⁷ Anna, Rajaji and Mohamed Ismail participated in the conference and delivered keynote addresses. Finally, the state level Anti - Hindi special conference was held at Madras on 13 October. Kalaignar handed over to Anna two lists of volunteers, who were willing to participate in the agitations and ready to undergo imprisonment. After releasing those lists, Anna delivered an inspiring speech, explaining the necessity of participating in the agitation.⁸

Hence there is no other away than to agitate over the inaction of the union government. We have decided to burn the copies of part XVII of the constitution as a protest against the imposition of Hindi and we have also decided to picket the union government offices as a protest against the inaction of the union government on our genuine demands. On 17 November, at 4 p.m., along with our friends T.M.Prathasarathy, T.K. ponnuvel, V.Venga and K.P. Sundaram, I will proceed in procession from Arivagam, our party headquarters at Madras to Triplicane beach, were all of us will burn part XVII of the constitution in a public meeting. Thereafter, picketing in front of the union government offices at Madras will begin. This struggle will go on district by district for one full year, till the end of 1964.⁹ Declared with determination that "you (the government) have the rifle and we have the life. If you are ready to shoot, we are ready to die' and with this announcement I call upon our cadres to rush to the battlefield".¹⁰

Accordingly, in the forenoon of 16 November 1963, Anna and his teammates started from his house at Kanchipuram in a jeep and proceeded towards Madras, with a plan to burn part XVII of the constitution on the next day. But all the five members – Anna, T.M. Parathasarathy, T.K. Ponnuruvelu, V.Venga and K.P. Sundaram – were arrested by the police at the outskirts of the Madras city. Following this, hundreds of the DMK functionaries were arrested throughout the state. The Government of Madras promulgated section 144 in all the major cities in the state banning processions and public meetings. On 16 December, Anna and his teammates were sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment.¹¹

As already announced the DMK frontline leaders and volunteers started picketing the Union Government offices on 2 December and continued the programme till 14 December 1963. K.A. Mathiazhagan K. Anbazagan, A.V.P. Aasai thambi K.A. Muniandy and D. Thiruganam were arrested for burning part XVII of constitution at Tilak Square in Madurai four days later Kalaingar and N.V. Natarajan, who had earlier garlanded and given a warm send off to S. Muthu and his team before proceeding to burn Part XVII of the Constitution, were arrested at Madras for aiding and abetting others in the act of burning Part XVII of the constitution. Mannai Narayanasamy, K. Thirupathy, C. Kavermaniam, A. V. Raju, Ramachandran, Mutharasu, P.S. Maniam and Muniappan were also arrested on the same charge. Later S. Muthu and his team after five months of trial were sentenced to one – year rigorous imprisonment while Kalaingar and others were sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment. Meanwhile, hundreds of volunteers were arrested for picketing the Union Government offices from 2 January to 12 January 1964.¹²

About that time an unprecedented voluntary sacrifice of human life took place to protest against the language hegemony of an irresponsible regime. It was the self – immolation of one A. Chinnasamy of Keelapaluvur in Tiruchy district. Keelappaluvur is a small hamlet, situated about 70 kms away from Tiruchy between Kallakkudi and Ariyalur. Chinnasamy was born in 1940 as the only son to his parents, Arumugam and Thangammal. Since Chinnasamy lost his father in his childhood, he was brought up by his mother and so he was able to study up to fifth standard only. His family owned a house, wet land of one acre and dry land of half acres. At the age of 21, Chinnasamy married Kamala, a girl from Aduthurai. Soon they got a female child, and named her Dravida Selvi. Chinnasamy's main occupation was agriculture and as family was a small one, they led a happy and self – contacted life.¹³

Chinnasamy joined the DMK in 1959 and thereafter he became a staunch follower of that party. He had high regards for Anna and Kalaingar, and their portraits adorned the wall of his house. Emotionally involved in the language policy and programmes of the DMK he enlisted himself as a volunteer to participate in the picketing agitation against the imposition of Hindi.¹⁴ On 22 January 1964, he left for Madras by train. In the early morning on that day, when the train halted at the mambalam railway station in Madras, Chinnasamy saw Chief Minister M. Bhaktavatsalam alighting from the same train. Immediately Chinnasamy rushed to the Chief Minister and, with folded hands made an emotional plea: “please save Tamil against the imposition of Hindi”. At once, the police removed him from

the scene and took him to the Egmore police station. After interrogation him, the police let him off.¹⁵

Probably, this incident gave a rude shock to Chinnasamy led him to a firm resolve to do something drastic to attract the attention of an irresponsible regime to the Tamils and to take remedial measures. He was already acquainted with the news of the self - immolation of the Buddha Pikkus in Thailand the South Vietnam against the authoritarian regiment. So he decided to emulate the example of the Buddha Pikkus and sacrifice his life of the cause of the Tamil language.

With such an iron resolve, Chinnasamy returned to his native place on 23 January and happily spent that day with the members his family. The next day he went to Tiruchy and wrote letters to his friend Nagarajan and some relatives informing them of his decision to commit self - immolation opposing the imposition of Hindi.

At 4.00 AM., on 25 January, Chinnasamy bought three gallons of petrol from the nearby petrol station and went to the open ground in front of the Tiruchy railway junction. There he poured petrol on his body and set fire to himself. The fire immediately spread all over his body, while he was shouting slogans, "Long live Tamil! Down with Hindi!" within minutes he fell down and died. The charred remains of Chinnasamy, which lay all along the ground, gave an awesome spectacle arousing both pathos and poignant thoughts. But the fire, that mercilessly took away the life of the brave Chinnasamy, was soon to engulf the entire Tamilnadu, exactly after a year.¹⁶ A fourth day after his death, Kalaingar visited the burial place of A. Chinnasamy and paid homage to him. On 2 February, participating in a public meeting at Karur, Kalaigar declared that henceforth the martyr A. Chinnasamy would be called the "Lion Tamil Chinnasamy!".¹⁷

Meanwhile, as the membership and the activities of the DMK increased manifold, the party decided to establish another office for his headquarters in South Madras. According to this incident DMK's agitation programmes of burning XVII of the Constitution and picketing offices of the Government continued in southern Madras. On 25 February 1964, DMK's agitation programmes in Thoothkudi for head of M. S. Elamurugau Porselvi, Pulavar Ponnivlavan and other participations. At the meeting they were burning of the constitution. So they were arrested and sent to Thoothukudi police Station on 27 February 1964. Next, on 2 to 14 March 1964, totally 57 members participated the general meeting with heads of S. Arumugam, Tamilarasan, Hussain. This meeting they were Picketing the office of the Union Government of Thoothukudi. So they were arrested by the *Thoothukudi* police on 14 March 1964. Totally 57 members were arrested in this incident.

On 15th August 1953 morning a batch of DMK volunteers conducted anti - Hindi demonstration by erasing Hindi letters from the name boards at Tuticorin Railway station platform. Again they had stopped a passenger train soon after starting from Tuticorin on 15 August at 6.25 A.M. they had stopped the train for four times before reaching to Tuti - Melur station, two miles away, by pulling the alarm communication Chord. Immediately the police had interfered and arrested thirty five persons and left the train moved. By that time when Prime Minister Nehru visited Tuti - Melur station a crowd of over one thousand

D.M.K. men assembled on both sides of the Railway line shouting slogans "Down with Nehru Government". Again nearly 150 persons squatted on the railway line, prevented the train from moving.¹⁸

Government was asked telephonic permission by the seeking permission to fire on two times when the crowd of demonstrators stopped a train near Tuti - melur about one mile from Tuticorin. It was started that when the mob was violent and indulged in stone throwing the police resorted to lathi charge on the crowd. As it proved ineffective, firing was ordered the collector and the District Magistrate, were present on the spot. It was also started that the police was compelled to fire on a second occasion and even after this only the mob had moved from the place, causing, damages and created troubles and mischief in the town. As a result of the firing it was started that three persons died on the spot and one died on the way to the hospital. Besides these twenty - one persons were stated to have been injured. In this particular case, it was stated that the collector and the additional District Magistrate of Tirunelveli were presented on the spot on their evidence formed the main part of the enquiry. The government therefore decided to appoint C.C. Ramakrishnan, I.C.S., collector of Madurai as Chairman and S.Maharajan, Sub - Judge, Tuticorin to conduct the enquiry.¹⁹

The enquiry covered the circumstances leading to the incidents that had happened near Tuticorin on 15th August and the circumstances which led to the opening of fire by the police. The enquiry was open to the public and to the press and to the all relevant evidences were recorded from all persons including railway officials, In view of these, the Chief Minister Kamaraj appealed to the D.M.K. men and the Dravidian Movement men to stop the agitation. Ramalingam, a resident of Kalugumalai was born to Kanthaswamy Pulavar and Chinna Sanmugam. Due to anti -Hindi spirit on his mind, he joined in the Hindi agitation on 5 March 1964. He started his agitation programme at Tuticorin where he burnt the Government Orders and Article XVII at the Head Post Office of Thoothukudi.²⁰

Because of his participation and notable role he was remanded by Tuticoin Court On 5th March 1964 for 15 days. Later he was imprisoned at Madurai Central Jail for about Three Months. During his Jail term he was suffered a lot. They then D.M.K. government offered pention amount RS 350 to Ramalingam. At present he received RS 3000. During the vigorous agitation 144 restriction was implemented. Hence agitators went one by one and destroyed all the G.Os which related with Hindi agitation. According to the list of government reports 35 agitators were arrested between 22 February 1964 and 7th March 1964.²¹

In 1970, then Chief Minister M. Karunanithi promised to work hard like Anna and strongly agitate Hindi. After that central government not imposed Hindi in Tamil Nadu but again in 1976 of afterwards Hindi was imposed. Due to that in 1986 the agitation started among the people more than 16 members sacrificed their lives. DMK leader Kalaigar Karunanithi, professor Anbalagan and 2000 members were arrested and to the charge of burning the XVII article of constitution and violence occurred in Tamil Nadu government temporarily withdrawn all its measures.

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