

Emergence of Tamil Nationalism- A Socio-Political Study

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Abstract

Tamil Nationalism could be defined as the earnest political aspiration of the Tamil elite who wanted to carve out a state for the protection and the promotion of their cultural ethos as well as their material interests. But Tamil Nationalism had experienced ups and downs in its journey. The Non-Brahmin movement sowed the seeds of Dravidian or Tamil Nationalism. However the Tamil renaissance, Dravidian consciousness and the Non-Brahmin movement are regarded by some scholars as 'distinct and separate political forces'.¹

During the second decade of the 20th century the term Dravidian gained a racial as well as a linguistic meaning. From the time of the formation of the Justice Party the term Dravidian applied to non-Brahmin castes in South India and Dravidian nationalism emerged as a defence of these castes, against Brahmin dominance and a reassertion of cultural identity. Therefore the term Dravidian may be said to have been brought into politics as a rallying point for South Indian non-Brahmins.

This research article is made an attempt to trace the emergence of Tamil Nationalism with socio-political background of Tamil Nadu.

The twentieth century was eventful in the history of Tamils and it was due to ever increasing articulation of new political identities based on linguistic consciousness and regional interests.² However they remained in a low profile as the nation was pre-occupied with political freedom. But the political identities began to take shape and could generate mass energy in the mammoth Madras Presidency only after independence.

The Tamil elite focused language and brought it to the centre stage of politics and of course it has come to predominate as a political determination in the politics of the Tamils. Tamil Nationalism became a force to reckon with factor such as delay in the formation of linguistic State, inter-state territorial dispute, imposition of Hindi and the demand for separate statehood strengthened the forces of Tamil Nationalism, the product of the Tamil Renaissance.

Tamil Renaissance was the revival of Tamil language and literature. It also denotes awakening and advancement of the Tamils in all spheres of life. It was not a sudden outburst but an evolution. It was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century mainly due to westernization. The European contact with the Tamils and their language dates back to the sixteenth century A.D.³ when the Portuguese began to establish trade factories on the western seaboard. The English, however, ultimately superseded all the other European commercial competitors and later became the permanent ruler of the land. They, therefore, naturally exerted the greatest and most lasting influence which quickened the process of westernization and fertilized the Tamil language and literature as no other foreign contact except that of Sanskrit had ever done before.

The zeal and enterprise of a few earnest European missionaries, introduction of printing in Tamil and publication of works, periodicals, lexicons and the new education system became effective agents of westernization, led to a creative urge among the Tamil elite and impelled them to adopt and assimilate similar methods in order to improve and enrich their language and literature.⁴

The Tamil press, comprising periodicals, journal, magazines and newspapers was an institution which has stimulated progress in every phase of social, political and public life. It has quickened thought, moulded opinion, modernized taste and given a fresh orientation outlook. Their extensive circulation at once provoked discussion and catered for a newly aroused curiosity and hunger for knowledge.

The British deliberately set out to strangle "Native language" ever since they induced English as the official language of India. In fact, the Tamil language and literature was neglected and ignored in every field of human activity. At the same time Telugu, one of the Dravidian language, arrested the growth of Tamil, more particularly in the field of music the finest of fine arts. The Brahmanical ideologist who had made inroads upon the Dravidian society could attempt successfully to infiltrate into the field of pristine Tamil language and literature, and this infiltration of Sanskrit on Tamil paved the way for the emergence of a new style called *Manippravalam*.⁵ In fact, Tamil not

only lost its pristine purity but also its rightful place despite its gloriousness rich antiquity.

Thinkers play a significant role in every movement and they have shaped the destiny of people. Tamil Renaissance movement was no exception. Religion, no doubt, has a place in history and politics. No wonder, the intellectual spark of the Tamil Renaissance came from two contemporaneous but distinct religious personalities, St. Ramalinga and Rev. Robert Caldwell. St. Ramalinga (1823-1874) was the forerunner of the Tamil Renaissance which resulted in the emergence of simple verse from the 'Manippravalam' style. Teaching spiritual language, he stressed the greatness of Tamil language.⁶ He wrote *Thiruvavurupa*, consisting of 7000 poems. His message had contained the seeds of awakening the Tamils.⁷ Robert Caldwell (1819-1891), the Scottish missionary and author of "A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family language" propounded theories about the origin and nature of Tamil or Dravidian culture that later helped the scholars who sought to prove the antiquity and purity of Tamil language.⁸ Emergence of Tamil consciousness to retrieve and foster Tamil language and literature was largely due to the impact of Caldwell.⁹

St. Ramalinga and Rev Robert Caldwell the two contemporary towering personalities left open the field for both the contemporary and the future scholars to sustain the spark and percolate it. Both the Indian and the Western scholars who lived in the later half of the nineteenth century continued their work.

Among the Indian scholars, Vedanayakam Pillai (1824-1889), the munsif of Mayuram, opened his school with *Pen Mathi Malai*, *Neethi Nul*, *Sarva Samaya Kirtanas*. Though a Christian convert, his ideas were not sectarian.¹⁰ He left many masterly prose works among which Pratha Mudaliyar Charitham and Suguna Sundary deserve special mention. Tamotharam Pillai (1832-1901) a retired judge of Pudukkottai did significant contribution to Tamil literature by editing *Vira Solium*, *Iraiyana Ahapporul*, *Tholkappium*, *Ilakkana Vilakkam*, *Sulamani* and other classics. He was a pioneer editor of the Tamil classics.¹¹ In the work editing U.V. Swaminatha Aiyer (1855-1942) stands aloft head and shoulder has unearthed many a literary nugget. He has edited *Chinthamani*, *Silappaadikarm*, *Manikekalai*, *Pattupattu*, *Purananuru*, *Perum Kathai* and *Purapporul Venbamalai*. P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897) wrote *Manonmaniam* a Tamil drama in five acts on the Shakespearean model. His poem *Tamil Deiva Vanakkam*, has become the national anthem of the Tamils.

V.G. Suryanarayana Sastri (1870-1903) famously known as Parithimar Kalaignar and Dravida Sastri¹² wrote History of Tamil language in ten chapters. He was also a joint editor of the Tamil Monthly Gnan Pothini. Knaga Sabai Pillai who died in 1903, wrote the Tamils 1800 years ago was an eye-opener to many of the richness of Tamil literature and Tamilian Civilization.¹³

Having effectively brought back to the memory of the Tamils their ancient glory and rich heritage, Tamil Renaissance kindled the latent spirit of ethnocentric and linguistic consciousness of the Tamils. The findings and theories of the Tamil renaissance, scholars revealed the antiquity of the Tamil culture. It ultimately resulted in sense of cultural self confidence of Tamils leading to Tamil Nationalism.

The intense love of the Tamils of their "Mozhi", "Inam" and "Nadu" is called Tamil Nationalism. Tamil Nationalism is the product of Tamil renaissance movement, is a blend of few sensitive factors such as 'Ina Unarvu' (ethnic sentiment) 'Mozhi Unarvu' (Linguistic sentiment) and 'Nattunarvu' (Nation sentiment). These factors are the effective symbols. *Mozhiunarvu* was the most powerful of all the symbols which united the masses and was the basis and bedrock of Tamil Nationalism.

Tamil Nationalism took shape as a political identity only after protected events and experiences. The formation of socio-political organizations namely the Justice Party, Self-Respect Movement, Dravida Kazhagam and the Tamil Arasu Kazhagam fanned ethnocentric and linguistic consciousness of the Tamils that was already kindled by the Tamil renaissance scholars. With Periyar's demand for Dravidastan Tamil Nationalism reached high watermark in the politics of the Tamils.

Tamil renaissance and Indian National movement were contemporaneous events. The interplay between the two led to mutual influence benefiting each other. Some of the prominent leaders of the Indian National movement were Tamil Scholars and poets. Their scholarly works not only roused the Indian patriotism¹⁴ but also kindled Tamil consciousness, leading to the rise and growth of Tamil Nationalism. But the separatist tendencies of the Tamil Nationalist began to clash with Indian Nationalist leading clash of identities.¹⁵

Most of the Congress leaders of the Indian National Congress were English educated or western educated elite. The proceedings of the Congress were carried on in English. The English speaking congress leadership could not make effective communication

with the congress men at the grass roots and mobilize mass following.¹⁶ This state of affairs continued till 1921. In August 1921 the Tamil Nadu Congress was formed in accordance with the resolution passed in the Nagpur congress,¹⁷ to the effect that the congress committee should be re-organized on the basis of local language. The Tamil nationalist carried on the demand for separate Dravida Nadu throughout the Second World War.¹⁸ In spite of poor response for the demand for Dravida Nadu in Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu speaking areas Periyar E.V.R. carried on the separatist propaganda doggedly with his supports that were mostly from the Tamil region.¹⁹

Tamil Nationalism and Indian Nationalism were at cross-roads. So the congress in Tamil Nadu had to face a complicated political trend in comparison to their congress-counterparts in the majority Dravidian language speaking areas. They could accommodate regional identity in their respective regions by identifying themselves with the linguistic community. At the same time, it was very difficult for the Tamil Nadu Congress to accommodate the concept of Tamil Nationalism and identifying with the Tamil Consciousness. Hence, there arose the problem of identity crisis in the Tamil Nadu congress. It was due to three major factors. Firstly the Tamils were awakened well enough to resurrect their glorious past. Secondly the communal politics which led to Brahmin and Non-Brahmin antagonism which was rather rampant and more bitter in the Tamil speaking areas than in the other South Indian regions. Thirdly the multi-lingual composition of the population of Madras, where linguistic minorities lived amidst the dominant Tamil majority. Tamil Nadu had to adopt a policy of restraint and moderation in order to ensure social harmony among linguistic communities so as to strengthen the forces of Nationalism.

Caste identification being an important phenomenon in the politics of India, it has become the basis traits of almost every party aspiring for power and popularity. All political behavior is strongly determined by the consideration of communal identification.²⁰ With the emergence of communal politics, a congenial environment was offered for the rise and growth of the non-Brahmin movement. It was the result of the real awakening amongst the non-Brahmin communities to their rights and privileges in the body-politics.²¹

The first election under the act of 1919 was held in the November 1920. The congress boycotted the election and Justice party was voted to power. Hardgrave observes: "for the first time in the history of India the lower castes of Madras have asserted themselves against the intellectual oligarchy of the

upper caste, and have seized political power in their own hands".²² In this way the electoral politics paved the way for communal politics. Communal politics, a product of historic inevitability, challenged the preponderance of the Brahmins in the Tamil society, politics and administration. It threatened the superiority of the Brahmins.

Thus politics has become virtually a struggle for power among various castes since the Mont-Ford reforms. Caste has become one of the few powerful determinants of political power. The social conflict contributed no less to belittle the preponderant position of Brahmins in the politics of Tamil Nadu. It provided a congenial environment for the rise of a new style of political leadership based on Tamil Nationalism.

The idea of separatism sprang up with the imposition of Hindi in 1937 which created fear in the minds of a section of leaders of Tamil Nadu that they would be reduced to a second class citizenship.²³ The introduction of compulsory Hindi was regarded as an attempt at the domination by the North India over South India, Aryan culture over Dravidian Culture and of Sanskrit over Tamil. Hence there arose a demand for a separate Tamil province or Dravida Nadu.²⁴ In 1938, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy put forward his demand for Tamil Nadu for Tamils.²⁵ The Slogan of Tamil Nadu for Tamils took shape in 1938 when the Tamil teachers' conference was held at Vellore in North Arcot district.²⁶ The Tamil Nadu separation day was celebrated on 10th September 1939. However the idea of sovereign independent Dravidistan took the final shape at the Justice Party conference held at Thiruvarur in 1940.²⁷ In the Justice Party conference at the Kanchipuram, Periyar E.V.R. unveiled the map of Dravida Nadu comprising the areas where Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada were spoken.²⁸

DravidaKazhagam formed by E.V.R. in 1944 vigorously propagated the idea of separation. A corps of black shirts volunteers were organized to fight for Dravidistan.²⁹ According to E.V.R. black shirt indicated the degradation of the Dravidian community.³⁰ C.N. Annadurai (1909-1969) one of the leading stalwarts of the E.V.R.'s camp broke away with his leader to launch D.M.K. in 1949. The D.K. and D.M.K. often demonstrated striking similarities in policy and programmes. Yet changing political circumstance prompted the D.K. to abandoned its aim of Dravidistan in favour of Tamil Nadu and offered its support to a congress non-Brahmin chief Minister K. Kamaraj, whom E.V.R. considered 'PachchaiTamilan'. However Dravidistan continued to be the main plank of the D.M.K. till the passing of the Anti-Secessionist Act in 1963.

The partition of polyglot state of Madras had been the highest manifestation of political identity based on language and material interests. The partition of Andhra Pradesh from Madras state in 1953 not only altered the boundaries but also added fuel to the rapid growth of Tamil Nationalism and affected the linguistic settings of the Madras state. In fact the Tamils formed the majority of total population of the polyglot Madras state in 1951.³¹ The pattern of the distribution of linguistic communities and their upward mobility in linguistic states ultimately strengthened the force of Tamil Nationalism.

The recommendation of both Dhar Commission and J.V.P. Committee not only delayed the formation of linguistic provinces but also belied the hopes of the political parties of the Tamil Nadu. In fact the delay forced the Tamil Nationalist to adopt agitational strategy to achieve their goal. The Telugus claims over the city of Madras were found to be the cause of Tamil Telugu tension. It was reported in the *AnandaVikadan*, a Tamil Weekly that every public affairs associated with the Tamil-Telugu linguistic communities or linguistic areas could invite controversy very easily.³² After the formation of the Andhra State, tension began to rage in the disputed areas. On 18th December 1953, a member of the legislative Assembly, K.Vinayakam who belonged to Tiruttani in Chittoor district informed the house of the mounting tension in Tirupati due to the high-handed attitude of the Telugus towards the Tamils.³³

Factualism is not a strange bed-fellow in party politics. It is inevitability in any political system.

According to David Arnold, the Congress party was deeply divided along ideological, strategic and factional lines.³⁴ The Brahmins in the Tamil Nadu branch of the Congress were divided into three groups under the leadership of Rajaji, SrinivasaAyengar and Satyamurthi.³⁵ In the year 1940, K.Kamaraj was elected as president of the Tamil Nadu Congress defeating his rival Subbaiah, sponsored by C.Rajagopalachari group. It was the first victory of the Satyamurthi against Rajaji. Kamaraj continued the presidentship till 1954. After 1940, as a result of the election of Kamaraj, Rajaji openly criticized the policy of Congress party, propounded pro-partition stance and did not participate in the Quit-India movement. Factualism in Congress party reached its climax during 1945-46. After independence the factional politics in the congress persisted and it became amorphous for the aspirants of political power. The manifestations and manipulation of the factualism corroded the image of the Congress in the State politics of Madras.

In this way the entire gamut of the politics of Tamils paved the way for the emergence of Tamil Nationalism. The Tamil Nationalist evolved a pattern of political identity and its main focus was the language which also became a political determinant. The factors such as the Non-Brahmin movement, Anti-Hindi agitation and the Tamil elite altogether had created awareness among the Tamils and Tamils began to rally round parties that focused the idea of Tamil Nationalism.

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