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ROLE OF COMMUNIST IN THE SELF RESPECT LEAGUE

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Abstract:-Self-Respect Movement and Communist Movement are two unique occurrences that took place in Tamilnadu in the course of the freedom movement. The former is a social movement that aimed at eradicating the social inequality that prevailed in Tamilnadu between the three social components namely Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and Untouchable. While the later is an economical and political concept that aimed at removing the economic inequality between the rich and the poor through revolution. Infact both the concepts are not identical. Yet when the national movement was as its peak in Tamilnadu there developed a close link between these two movements and for a time the Self-Respect Movement assumed a sought of political colour. This was owing to the impact of Communist propaganda. The role of Tamilnadu Communists leaders like Jeevanandham and Ramamurthi, in changing the attitude of E.V.R. and the way in which they utilised the Self-Respectors for propagating Communism was clearly depicted.

Keywords:Communism, Socialism, Brahminism, Varnasrama dharma, Capitalists.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Self-Respect' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Suyamariathai'. It is a combination of two words 'Suya' which means 'Self' and 'Mariyathai' which means 'Respect'. Its main object in the early years was to secure communal representation in all spheres of public life. But subsequently the Self-Respect Movement confined its activities to social reform in which it aimed to give Non-Brahmins a sense of pride. Communism, a modern economic and political ideology refers to a system of political and economic organization in which property is owned by the community and all citizens share in the enjoyment of the common wealth, more or less according to their needs. The two parties namely the Self Respect League and the communist parties opposed the congress and demanded economic, social and political reforms.

AIMS OF SELF RESPECT LEAGUE

In the initial stage, the congress party in the Madras Presidency was dominated by the Brahmins and the party was considered as a Brahmin organisation.[1] E.V.Ramasami Naicker found a place to satisfy his thirst for service to the Non-Brahmin Community.[2] In the beginning E.V.R tried to abolish the caste differences so as to ensure social justice to all. E.V.R vowed that the Brahmin domination in the congress should be crushed. When his attempts met with failure, he left the congress and started the Self Respected Movement with the following aims:[3]

- ❖ To crush the Brahmin dominated congress by co-operating with the British.
- ❖ To work towards the removal of caste system that dominates the Hindu society.
- ❖ To work for attaining Socialism.[4]

The objectives of the Self-Respect movement were highly laudable as they were of universal in nature. E.V.Ramasamy Naicker started the Self-Respect Movement and the campaign of popularisation of the objectives of Self-Respect Movement had attracted a large numbers of workers and young men as well into that movement.[5] Resolutions were passed condemning Varnasrama dharma, the belief in superiority based on birth and the usage of

caste suffixes along the names.

After the inauguration of the Self Respect Movement, many branches sprang up all over the Tamil districts of the presidency. There were about 60 well established branches, mainly located in Tanjavur, Coimbatore, Ramnad, Tirunelveli, South and North Arcot Districts.[6] In April 1928 he took over the management of the 'Dravidian', a Tamil paper. In November he started an English weekly entitled "Revolt", jointly edited by himself, and a benchman S.Ramanathan, and another Tamil weekly entitled "Kudi-Arasu", to further his own movement.[7]

A New Direction

With regard to the concept of the economic equality E.V.R. was much influenced by the local communist Singaravelu Chettiar.[8] Singaravelu and E.V.R were close associates within the congress party. E.V.R's support to the railway workers' strike in 1927 and 1928 tightened their bond of friendship. Further Singaravelu's instinct to fight against any social injustice was appreciated by E.V.R. His activities infact opened the eyes of workers of the Self-Respect Movement to a wider horizon.[9]

Communist Propaganda

The most important of the early activities of the Self Respect Movement was the convening of the first provincial Self Respect Conference at Chingleput, on 17 February 1929. The Self Respect leaders took this as an opportunity to assess the impact of their propaganda and to evolve a future programme.[10] E.V.R who wanted to popularise his ideology among the mass, organised a series of conferences in different parts of the Madras Presidency.[11] Communist leaders took part in those conferences and played a notable role. One such notable communist leader was Jeevanandam. He became a recognised leader of the Self Respect Movement. He participated in the Self Respect conferences held at Chingleput on 17th and 18th February 1929, at Erode in 1930 and at Virudhunagar in 1931.[12] His speeches at Virudhunagar conference on 26th February was worth mentioning. In that conference he advocated communism. It was applauded with the cry of "Down with capitalism".[13]

Another milestone in the history of Self Respect Movement and communist movement took place at the conference of Self-Respectors in Madras on 26th December 1931. This conference was inaugurated by Singaravelu. In his long opening address, he applauded the moves undertaken by the adherents of the Self Respect Movement to fight against the age old prejudices, caste constraints and religious superstition.[14] Besides he felt that it was the time to take the concept of Socialism to the doors of the Self-Respectors. He wrote a series of twelve articles in their weekly paper "Kudi Arasu" under the heading "The Work before us". These articles as he expected to spread communist doctrines far and wide in the Madras Presidency.[15] Further it encouraged a group of labour leaders to form a new party entitled "The Madras Provincial Labour Party" with communist leanings.

Flirting communism

While on tour at U.S.S.R. E.V.R, discussed with S.Ramanathan, the possibility of adopting a new programme for the movement in the light of the experience he gained in the U.S.S.R. They returned to India in high spirits with the hot gospel of communism to be preached and spread at home.[16] On his return to Madras on 11th November 1932, E.V.R. decided to change the character of the movement.[17] The Self-Respect planning committee had a special meeting at Erode under the presidenship of Singaravelu.[18]

His trip to Moscow greatly influenced him and after his arrival he regarded the Self Respect Party as a kin to the communist party and stressed that the movement was not a reformist movement, but a revolutionary movement and he gave a Clarion call to everyone to join the revolution without any fear.[19] He advocated the overthrow of existing Government and the abolition of capitalism. A note worthy feature of his propaganda was his open advocacy of communism.[20]

The impact could be easily noted by E.V.R's statement after his return from European tour. He advised the workers of the movement to use the word 'Thozhar' while addressing each other.[21] Meetings were held in the majority of the Tamil districts to celebrate May Day.[22] May Day celebration by the Self-Respectors could be sited as an example of Russian influence. E.V.R made an appeal to the Self-Respectors and Socialist Associations to celebrate it.[23] At this juncture Jeevanandham one of the leaders of the Self Respect Movement with leftist ideas accompanied E.V.R and delivered thought provoking speeches to the masses.[24] Jeevandham started a new weekly 'Samadharmam' on 1 August 1934 at Jaoarpatti with V.Parthasarathi as its editor'. The covering page contained his songs on Socialism.[25] It was published in the form of Tamil book entitled "Socialist Padalgal".[26]

Embraced Communism

E.V.R attempted to give a socialist orientation to the Self- Respect Movement and for this purpose he convened a meeting of his followers at his residence in Erode on 28-29 December 1932. He and Singaravelu chetti

convened a meeting at Erode of Self-respect workers, who were all non entities without property or influence. This meeting proceeded to set up a new political section styled "The Samadharna(Socialist) Party at South India" and to formulate a new policy for the Self-Respect League. A committee of 32 members from different areas of the Tamil districts was formed for the prosecution of the party programme.

A biography of Lenin was translated into Tamil and serialised in Samadharmam. Similarity in identical concepts between Self-Respect Movement and Communism was pointed out in Tamil weeklies like Puratchi, Pahutharivu, Samadharmam and Vedigundu. The Self-Respecters administration for Russia showed itself flagrantly in a determined tendency to defend the Soviet Union in all matters under all Circumstances.[27] E.V.R and Jeevanandham exchanged ideas at this meeting and decided to preach communism everywhere thereafter.

Abstain Communism

The closer link between the Communists and the Self-Respecters got a setback. The differences between Jeevanandham and E.V.R took plea on the question of communist propaganda through literature. The article in the paper 'Puratchi' under the caption "Blind Capitalists and Deaf Government"[28] was highly criticised by E.V.R. The Tamil translation of Bhagat Singh's letter "Why I am an Athiest"[29] and its publication in Kudi Arasu[30] was disliked by E.V.R. These two articles contained seditious materials instigating violence against the Government. Sooner Jeevanandham, the writer and E.V.R., being the publisher responsible for bringing in sedition and were arrested.[31]

In the mean time there took place a marvelous change in the attitude of E.V.R. The Government kept a heap of records of the objectionable speeches and writings of E.V.R.[32] As a sequel to this E.V.R decided to abandon the Communist propaganda. He wanted to be at the good books of the Government so as to develop him and Self-Respect League. In this situation under the guidance of Singaravelu, K.Murugesan along with T.N.Ramachandran started a Tamil monthly called 'Pudu Ulagam' Singaravelu's article 'Pudu Ulagam' paved the way for all the Self-Respect socialist to seek a new path to achieve the objectives and programmes that they had formulated at Erode.[33]

CONCLUSION

The Communist Movement in Tamilnadu was linked with Self-Respect League organised by E.V.Ramasamy Naicker a social reformer. The concept of social and economic equality adhered by E.V.R. influenced the Tamilnadu Communist like Singaravelu Chettiar. The co-ordination between these two movements led to the spread of leftist ideals among the working masses. Both the groups pledges to fight against caste constrains and religious superstitions. But the question of Communist propaganda through literature differences arose between E.V.R. and the Communists. The imprisonment of E.V.R. for publishing seditious articles in his Tamil weekly "Kudi Arasu" led to the rift between the Communists and the E.V.R. The fling with the communists was over. E.V.R. was back with the Justices and spent the next few years trying to repair the damages done to the movement by the loss of communists.

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