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THE INTRODUCTION OF HINDI AND GROWTH OF TAMIL NATIONALISM IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

The Indian National Congress accepted the advice of Gandhi on the language policy. Accordingly, the Congress Working Committee, at its meeting held at Kanpur on 23rd December 1925, resolved that henceforth all its meetings should be conducted both in Hindustani and English. Sarojini Naidu, in her presidential address to the fourth session of the All-India Hindi Conference at Madras in December 1927, said: "You cannot unify a nation by one dress; but you can do so by one language. It is only when there is one language, that the country will be free." Gandhi, earnestly undertook an experiment of spreading the Hindi language to South India. Thus the propagation of Hindi with its projected objectives was moving on the desired lines. But



the trouble started once the study of Hindi was made compulsory in the secondary schools in Madras Presidency. Rajaji declared that the study of Hindi would be made compulsory in schools. C.N. Annadurai, registered his protest against the announcement of Rajaji regarding the compulsory study of Hindi. For a while, the Justices and the Self-Respectors made an attractive appeal to non-Brahmins on racial and communal lines which paved the way for cementing the forces of regionalism as well as Tamil nationalism.

KEYWORDS: Government, Gandhi, Rajaji, E.V. Ramasamy, D.M.K.,

Hindi, Tamil, Somasundara Bharathi, Umamaheswaran, Sathyamurthi, Trichy, Tirunelveli.

INTRODUCTION:

The Government of India Act of 1935 provided for a Federal Government at the Centre and Provincial Governments at the Provinces with a large measure of autonomy. The Congress participated in the general elections held in 1937. In the Madras Presidency, the Congress won 159 seats. C. Rajagopalachari, respectfully called Rajaji, became the leader of the Congress Legislature Party and assumed charge as Premier (Prime

Minister) on 14th July 1937. Along with Rajaji, nine Ministers and ten Parliamentary Secretaries also assumed office.¹

Rajaji, speaking at a function organized by Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha on 12th July 1937, emphasized the importance of Hindi saying that "it would enable South Indians to understand North Indians better than at present, that Hindi would be found necessary in business and politics in India and that he was of the opinion that Hindi could be made a compulsory subject in schools."² Their fear was strengthened by the language policy pursued by Rajaji ministry soon after it was formed in July 1937. Rajaji vaguely outlined the language policy at a meet, and at the press session two days before the formation of ministry on 12th July 1937. At that meeting, he stressed the

need for a common language and he favoured Hindi to be the lingua franca of the country.³

On 10th August, participating in a meeting held at Ramakrishna Students Home, Madras, Rajaji declared that the study of Hindi would be made compulsory in schools. Sathyamurthi, a veteran Congress leader, said that the study of Sanskrit should also be

made compulsory along with Hindi to establish 'Ramrajya' and to safeguard Varnashrma Dharma. This language policy of the Congress was based on Gandhi's concept of Swadeshi, which was to replace English by Hindi as the common language of the country.⁴

OBJECTION TO HINDI

The next day after Rajaji's announcement on the introduction of compulsory Hindi, The Madras Mail, leading English daily in an editorial entitled "Nothing in Haste", warned the Premier against implementing the new proposal without the proper examination of their outcome. It also questioned whether any North Indian Ministry would propose to compel the Hindi-speaking children to learn a South Indian vernacular in order to bring their educational tasks to be equal to those of the school children of the South.⁵

C.N. Annadurai, who later became the founder leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, registered his protest against the announcement of Rajaji regarding the compulsory study of Hindi. At the Self-Respect Movement Conference held at Duraiyur in Tiruchi District on 27th August 1937, Annadurai, in his presidential address, made an appeal to the Tamils to oppose compulsory study of Hindi to safeguard their language and culture.⁶

On the same day in a specially organized meeting, under the presidentship of a leading lawyer Venkatachalam, at Karanthai Tamil Sangam in Thanjavur District, well-known Tamil scholars, T.V. Uma Maheswaran, J.M. Somasundaram Pillai, and S. Kuppusamy spoke condemning the introduction of Hindi. On 29th August 1937, under the patronage of the Tamil Academy of Thiruvaiyaru, students and teachers led by S. Govindasamy Pillai and Somasundara Desikar have taken a procession opposing Hindi. Thus both places Karanthai and Thiruvaiyaru are in Thanjavur District.⁷

Following the events in Thanjavur District, protest meetings were organized in quick succession in Madras and other places. On 5th September, Annadurai addressed a gathering at Soundarya Mahal, Madras with Somasundara Bharathi in chair and explained the reasons for opposing Hindi. Maraimalai Adigal, a great Tamil scholar and saint, in a meeting held at Gokhale Hall, Madras, on 4th October, compared the richness and antiquity of Tamil language and literature with those of the literary heritage of Hindi and called upon the Tamils to prepare themselves for the struggle against Hindi. On 12th October 1937 in a meeting organized at Tirunelveli under the presidentship of M.C. Poornalingam Pillai, Annadurai and Somasundara Bharathi urged strongly the Tamil youths to join the struggle against Hindi.⁸

E.V. Ramasamy (E.V.R.) quit the Congress Party in 1925. Immediately afterwards, he started the Self-Respect Movement and launched a Tamil magazine Kudi Arasu (Republic), in which he wrote many articles opposing Brahmanism and Hindi. Under his patronage, Self-Respect Conferences were held at Duraiyur, Salem, Rasipuram, Ambur, Namakkal, Thanjavur and Madurai on various days. In all these conferences, resolutions were passed condemning Hindi imposition.⁹

REASON FOR OPPOSITION TO HINDI

In Madras the English educated non-Brahmins, as well as some Brahmins, took an interest in reviving the Dravidian language by interpreting their literature and studying it on modern lines. This revival was shrewdly exploited for political reasons, first, by the provincial Congress and, second, by the leaders of the Justice Party, although their motives and purposes were different. If the former used it for arousing the nationalist spirit, the latter employed it for political purposes. As a result, since 1917 Tamil had been increasingly used as a vehicle of political expression. C. Subramania Bharati, Varadarajulu Naidu, Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, Rajaji, Sathyamurthi and other nationalists in Tamil Nadu contributed their share to vernacularizing.¹⁰

The Justicites and the Self-Respectors made an attractive appeal to non-Brahmins on racial and communal lines which inevitably strengthened the forces of regionalism as well as Tamil nationalism. In 1937

when Hindi was proposed as a subject of study in the schools, this strong regionalism was revived. There were two main reasons for the Tamil scholars' opposition to Hindi. In the first place, the introduction of Hindi meant to them the revival of Sanskrit, a language which they traditionally opposed. Secondly, the mother tongue was not a compulsory subject in the curriculum in those days and many passed out of the schools without the knowledge of their mother tongue. Therefore they argued that, without making the mother tongue as a compulsory subject, making Hindi as compulsory subject in schools was not acceptable to Tamils.¹¹

TAMIL PROTECTION SOCIETY

While the opposition to Hindi was gaining impetus in the province from different sections of the people, the Tamil scholars organized themselves, purely from cultural considerations, into an association called the 'Society for the Protection of Tamil Language' in 1937. Its headquarters was at Tirunelveli, a centre of Tamil revivalism in the early years of Twentieth Century. N.V. Nelliappa Pillai, a retired Tahsildar, was the president. The aim of the Society was to protect Tamil. In order to educate the public, pamphlets were published which discussed what the introduction of compulsory Hindi in the school curricula would mean to Tamils and warned Rajaji not to impose Hindi. It was viewed as a threat to the Tamil language.¹²

Public meetings were convened at regular intervals, which were often addressed by S. Somasundara Bharati, Eelathu Sivananda Adigal and Kanchi Paravasathu Rajaji. On 5th September 1937, at a largely attended public meeting in Tirunelveli the speakers condemned the compulsory introduction of Hindi. Letters were also addressed by the members of this society in their individual capacity as Congressmen, to Gandhi, Nehru and other North Indian leaders, requesting them to intervene and dissuade Rajaji from introducing Hindi in schools.¹³

THE ANTI-HINDI CONFERENCES

On 26th December 1937, the Madras Provincial Tamils Conference was held at Trichy. The Conference, which was started with a mammoth procession of the volunteers and leaders, was inaugurated by an eminent lawyer K. Subramanian Pillai. Umamaheswaran Pillai welcomed the gathering and Somasundara Bharathi presided over the Conference, in which E.V.R. thundered his voice against Hindi. Resolutions were passed condemning the introduction of compulsory study of Hindi and demanding a separate State for Tamils.¹⁴

The conference passed one significant resolution that it resolved to appoint a committee consisting of Somasundara Bharathi, E.V.R. and T.V. Umamaheswaran Pillai, president of the Karanthai Tamil Sangam, to meet governor.¹⁵ It was to explain the discontent of the Tamils in the matter of making Hindi compulsory in public schools, as it will cause great damage to the Tamil language and culture.¹⁶ Trichy conference conducted was followed by another significant anti-Hindi conference, which was organized at Kanchipuram on 27th February 1938 under the presidentship of K.V. Reddy Naidu, the former Prime Minister of Madras Presidency Resolutions were passed condemning compulsory Hindi, and warning the government not to spend the public fund on Hindi, which would create unrest among the masses.¹⁷

In order to welcome a separate Tamil province to be established, the Tamilian Association with thirty eight members was inaugurated at the conference itself, under the leadership of Somasundara Bharathi. Thereafter the Tamil Protection Society seemed to have merged with this.¹⁸

INTRODUCTION OF HINDI IN 125 SCHOOLS

Rajaji, as Premier and Finance Minister, while presenting the annual budget for 1938-1939 in the Madras Legislative Assembly, announced that provision had been made in the budget for the teaching of Hindi in 125 secondary schools. M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, Justice Party Leader in the Legislative Assembly, demanded the scraping of compulsion clause in the study of Hindi and making it optional.¹⁹ In spite of the noisy protest made against the imposition of Hindi both inside and outside the Assembly, the Government ignored this protest and the sentiments against Hindi and ultimately it allocated a sum of Rs. 20,000 for payment of teachers to teach Hindi.²⁰

The government was adamant in ignoring the mounting opposition and did not make the teaching of Hindi optional. On 21st April 1938 the Madras Government passed an order introducing the study of Hindi

compulsory in certain secondary schools in the Presidency.²¹ Nine days later on 30th April 1938 the Ministry of Public Information issued a press communiqué which said that for this purpose, 125 Government secondary schools were selected and these were distributed as four schools in Kannada speaking region, seven in Malayalam, fifty four in Telugu, and sixty in Tamil.²²

INITIAL REACTION TO HINDI

The initial reaction to the government orders came first of all in the form of an individual satyagraha. One Jagadesan (who had adopted 'Stalin' as his first name), probably a Self- Respector, residing at Thyagarayanagar in Madras, commenced a fast unto death from 1st May 1938, not only to protest against compulsory Hindi but to force the government to withdraw its orders.²³ Since the leaders of the anti-Hindi movement and the Justicites were opposed to the use of fasts as political weapons, they discouraged others from resorting to fasting in their campaigns against Hindi. After ten weeks Jagadesan himself had withdrawn his fast.²⁴ The Madurai District Anti-Hindi Conference was held under the chairmanship of Medai Thalavai Kumarasamy Mudaliar on 8th May 1938, and it requested the parents to boycott the 125 schools, where compulsory Hindi was introduced and send their children to other schools. At the same time a committee was formed, with the avowed object of picketing such schools.²⁵ Meanwhile E.V.R. wrote series of inflammatory editorials in Kudi Arasu against compulsory Hindi. However, he had intensified the whole anti-Hindi movement.²⁶

Tamil scholars and political leaders met at Tennur, in Tiruchy on 28th May, and resolved to form a Madras Provincial Anti-Hindi League under the chairmanship of Somasundara Bharathi with K.A.P. Viswanatham as Secretary and E.V.R., Umamaheswaran, W.P.A. Soundara Pandiyan as members. This was the first state level committee formed to oppose Hindi.²⁷ It considered the Hindi question in all its implications and decided to launch a campaign. At the conclusion of the meeting the committee formally inaugurated the Madras Provincial Anti-Hindi League with 112 members. Full authority was also given to C.D. Nayagam to launch organized picketing before the Premier Rajaji's house at Thyagarayanagar in Madras on 1st June 1938.²⁸

As expected Nayagam came with 300 volunteers on 1st June 1938 in front of the Premier's residence and they held a meeting which was addressed by Arunagiri Adigal, Shanmugananda Adigal, Eelathu Adigal and Vimalananda Adigal. Towards the end of the meeting one Ponnuswami of Palladam, began his fast unto death.²⁹ Ponnuswami's fast on 1st June onwards attracted the attention of a large number of politicians, for he claimed to be a Congressman. Many Self-Respecters and Justicites, including N. Sivaraj, visited him. The Minister for Public Information, Ramanathan, was one of the visitors.³⁰

In continuation, on 3rd June a procession of over 1,000 people started from Kodambakkam staged a demonstration in front of Premier's residence. The procession was headed by Nayagam and Shanmugananda Adigal. The police arrested them along with Palladam Ponnuswami was on fast from 1st June 1938 in the vicinity of the Premier's residence and they were brought before the Chief Presidency Magistrate, to be remanded.³¹

They were charged with offences under Criminal Law Amendment Act. It was a comprehensive Act promulgated in the teeth of opposition in 1932 to suppress the civil disobedience movement. All the Congressmen including Rajaji condemned it as the 'lawless law'. The same law was, however, invoked by the Congress leaders to put down the anti-Hindi agitation. All three agitators were charged for inciting people by their speeches and action to loiter in front of the Premier's residence.³²

Later, Palladam Ponnusamy was sentenced to six weeks rigorous imprisonment. He was the first, in the history of Anti-Hindi Agitations, to be arrested and sentenced. C.D. Nayagam was sentenced to one month simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/- and Shanmuganantha Adigal to four months simple imprisonment.³³

The Government's firm stand on the implementation of Hindi in schools and the stern action taken against the civil resisters were criticized by all the leading newspapers in the country. Despite the caution of the newspapers, the government policy was not modified. Demonstrations were held before the schools where Hindi was compulsorily taught on their reopening in July 1938 as well as before the Premier's residence.³⁴

Picketing educational institutions had a tremendous propaganda value for the anti- Hindi movement. Students boycotted the Hindi classes. They staged demonstrations at Salem, Trichi and Tirunelveli, causing new

problems for the educational authorities.³⁵

On 9th June 1938, the Government issued a press communiqué to explain the reasons for the introduction of compulsory study of Hindi. It is stated that the government desires to make it clear to remove the misconceptions on this subject. The educated youth should possess a working knowledge of the most widely spoken language in India to be part of national life. Therefore Government decided to introduce of Hindi in the secondary school curriculum of our province.³⁶

But the volunteers continued to picket schools, where compulsory study of Hindi was introduced. As a result, many leaders and volunteers including Arunagiri Adigal, Elathu Sivananda Adigal, K.M. Balasubramaniam and Marai Thirunavukkarasu were arrested and sentenced to varying periods of imprisonment.³⁷

To conclude, Language is simply a vehicle of thoughts and an instrument to communicate with each other. But nowadays it has become symbol to be proud of that. In a multilingual country like India, language consciousness is more prominent. Every one approaches the language problem with sentiment while expecting others to approach the problem without emotion. This is the peculiar situation prevailing. Without admitting any emotional intervention, a sincere attempt has been made to study the official language problem. And it recommends appropriate solutions to settle it once and for all.

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