



ISSN: 2231-5063

IMPACT FACTOR : 4.6052 (UIF)

VOLUME - 6 | ISSUE - 9 | MARCH - 2017

DRAVIDIAN PARTIES AND HINDI LETTER ERASING AGITATION**P.Rajaganapathy****Full-Time Ph.D. Research Scholar ,
Department of History , Presidency College
Chennai.****ABSTRACT**

In the Independent India, the Central Government has been given top priority to Hindi and treated it as the national language and believed that it would promote the integrity of the people of India. The Congress Government which was in power both at centre and Madras State took efforts to impose Hindi in the non-Hindi speaking people of Tamil Nadu in all the possible ways. The majority of the non-Hindi speaking Tamils of the Tamil Districts strongly opposed the imposition of Hindi. While Rajaji, the popular Congress leader who backed the imposition of Hindi in the pre-Independent period, in the later period of the post-Independent period was against the imposition of Hindi. He backed the views of the D.K. and D.M.K with regard to the position of Hindi. Both the Dravidian parties, the D.K. headed

by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and D.M.K. which was headed by C.N.Annadurai strongly expressed their stand in action against the imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu. C.N.Annadurai, an erudite Tamil scholar was fully supported by the Tamil intellectuals in the Hindi issue. The D.M.K. took all possible steps to prevent the imposition of Hindi. One such agitation launched by both D.K. and D.M.K. was Hindi letter erasing agitations. At that times, in the boards in public places and Central Government Offices displayed the Hindi letters which attracted the attention of the Tamil leaders who came forward to erase Hindi letters. In this connection, many arrests were made which paved the way for the spread of the Anti-Hindi Agitation in Tamil Nadu

KEY WORDS : Hindi, D.M.K., D.K., Congress, Nehru, E.V.R., C.N.Annadurai, Harijan, Collector, Railway Station

INTRODUCTION :

When the Second World War came to an end in 1945 Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy announced the elections for the Central Provincial Legislative Assemblies. Accordingly the elections were held in 1946. In the Madras Legislative Assembly the Congress Party secured 163 seats out of the total 215, Muslim League 28, Communists 2, Europeans 7, Independents 6, Independent part 7 while 2 seats fell vacant. Once again Rajaji tried for the post of Premier of Madras with the support of Gandhi. But unfortunately he was rejected by the Congress members by 148 votes 38.¹ On 30th April 1946, T.Prakasam was elected as the leader of the Congress party but due to some inner-party quarrels he resigned his post within a year. He was succeeded by O.P.Ramasamy Reddy who was assumed office on 23rd March 1947. T.Avinashilingam Chettiar joined in his



ministry as Education Minister.² The new Government's policy towards Hindi language was same as Rajaji's ministry.

After Independence in 1947 Indian Government decided to make Hindi as the National and official language. Hence, the conflicting political ideology inherent in the Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) from its origin came to the fore over the celebration of the Independence Day on 15th August 1947. E.V.Ramasamy (E.V.R.) declared it a day of mourning. E.V.R. asked his followers to celebrate the Independence Day as a 'Day of Mourning'.³

When Omandur Ramasamy Reddiar was the Chief Minister of Madras state on 23rd March 1947 Avanasilingam Chettiar was the Education Minister of the state. He introduced Hindi compulsory subject in schools. Accordingly the government passed an order on 20th June 1948.⁴ But this time, the government was clever enough to pass such an order, making study of Hindi compulsory only in Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada regions and optional in Tamil Nadu. They wanted that Hindi should be made compulsory in Tamil Nadu schools also. Hence once again Hindi agitation was started. In order to discuss the situation a meeting was convened on 17th July 1948 at Saint Mar's Hall. The meeting was attended by E.V.R., C.N. Annadurai, Thiru. Vi. Ka., Swamy Arunagirinathan. During this meeting Panmozhi Pavalur K. Appadurai and his wife Alamelu Appadurai were severely attacked.⁵

On 1st August 1948, D.K. convened its executive meeting at Madras. Its main aim was to discuss the plan about anti-Hindi agitation. Districts' representatives participated in the meeting and the resolution was unanimously passed. Accordingly, the Government of Madras must withdraw the imposition of Hindi in all schools from standard 1 to 6. Apart from this, Hindi should not be made either as a compulsory or optional subject for the above classes in any school.⁶

But the Madras Government did not come forward to accept this proposal. Hence the D.K. announced its actions namely picketing in front of all schools, to organize public meetings and processions. In order to carry out these action plans an executive committee was formed.

In order to implement the action plan an agitation was organized under the leadership of C.N. Annadurai on 10th August 1948 at the Hindu Theological High School Madras. Through this agitation they have requested the students not to attend the schools.

The agitation started in front of Muthaialpet School in Madras on 10th August 1948. Thousands of volunteers of D.K. by wearing black shirts and holding black flags, showed their protest in a peaceful manner to Rajaji, the then Governor General of India. Women also participated in this agitation and this agitation went on for twenty two days.⁷

The Congress Government took several suppressive measures to control the agitators. In spite of this, the agitators continued their black flag agitation. They conducted the black flag demonstration against both the central and state ministers and also the Governor of Madras, Maharaj of Bhavanagar, Chief Minister Omandur Ramasamy Reddiar and the Education Minister Avinasalingam. From Madras this agitation spread to other places like Madurai, Tiruchy, Kovai, Erode, Salem and Kanchipuram.

The leader of the Tamilarasu Kazhagam (T.K.) M.P. Sivaganam supported D.K.'s anti-Hindi agitation. On 14th August 1948 the Tamil Nadu Teachers Conference was held and in that M. P. Sivaganam passed a resolution. In that resolution they requested the government to immediately withdraw Hindi from primary, middle and higher class syllabus.

HARIJAN STUDENTS AGITATORS

The Harijan students of the Board High School, Kuttalam did not play any active or open part in the anti-Hindi agitation. But certain incidents which took place on the Independence Day on 15th August 1948 to show that some of them have strong leanings towards the Black shirt movement and the anti-Hindi agitation. A few in mates of the Harijan Hostel joined the public procession that went round the streets of Kuttalam in the evening of

15th August 1948 and created some disturbance by shouting anti-Hindi and anti-Government slogans while other slogans were being shouted by the main body of the precisionists. This was reported to the Head Master of the school by the President of the local Congress Committee on 16th August 1948. The Head Master after due enquiry and in consultation with the staff council suspended three Harijan pupils for two weeks from the hostel. This led to a hunger strike by six Harijan pupils on 24th August 1948. The number swelled to 50 on 25th August 1948.

On the Independence Day of 15th August 1948, five pupils of whom three were Harijans were absent at the school flag salutation ceremony and they were fined a few annas four each. The fine was paid. The next day the school compound walls and the L.F.Hospital walls were disfigured with anti-Hindi slogans. A reference was also made to the the Black shirts meeting held in the public park the next day.

About 3.30 a.m. on 26th August 1948, the shed of the Harijan Hostel was found to be on fire. Five Harijan pupils including two of the six pupils who led the strike are reported to have been sleeping in the shed. They woke up on hearing the alarm raised by the librarian who was sleeping in a room in the main building directly south of the shed. The fire could not be put out and the entire shed was burnt down. The sub-Inspector of Police is reported to have come to the spot when the shed was burning. The names of agitators were K.Tamilarasu, VI. Form, K. Sellapillar VI Form, M.Rengasami V Form, M.Govindan IV Form. The hostel was immediately closed and all students were asked to stay outside.⁸

On 22nd August 1948 executive committee of the D.K. assembled at Madras. The famous leaders those who attended the meeting were E.V.R., C.N. Annadurai, K.A.Mathiazagan, C.V.M.Annamalai, K.K.Neelamegam, E.V.K.Sampath, and A.P.Janardhanam. The agitations have decided to show black flag against Rajaji then Governor – General of India. But suddenly the police arrested all the 95 agitators who were assembled there. On 24th -25th October the D.K. Party conducted an anti-Hindi meeting at Erode and meeting was attended by 50,000 people.⁹ In this meeting E.V.R. and Thiru. Vi.Ka. requested the Government to withdraw the compulsory Hindi in schools.

The Hyderabad Nizam took military action against the Indian Government. This military action was known as “Razaklers Movement”. Due to this military action, E.V.R. withdrew the Hindi agitation temporarily.¹⁰

A meeting was held on 2nd November 1948 and in that meeting it was decided to continue the agitation. According to this decision the agitation took place in front of the Muthialpet High School Madras under the leadership of Alamelu Appadurai. During this agitation the police arrested the agitators including twelve women. Sathiyavani Muthu was also imprisoned. For more than hundred days this agitation continued. With the intensity of the agitation throughout the State, the Government decided to withdraw the resolution of compulsory Hindi education at a school level. With this, the then Education Minister Avinasalinagam resigned. Due to this action of the government the anti-Hindi agitation came to an end.¹¹

Formation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

In 1949 E.V.R. who was then at the age of 72, announced his marriage with 28 years old Maniammai and nominated her as his successor. C.N.Annadurai and his group opposed this unequal marriage and also the undemocratic succession sought to impose on the party. Protesting against this, C.N.Annadurai founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) on 17th September 1949. Then onward D.M.K. began to serve the people as a social organization. During this period C.N.Annadurai founded and edited dailies like *Dravida Nadu*, *Malai Mani*, *Nam Nadu*, *Kanchi*, *Home Rule* and *Home Land*.¹²

Hindi in the Republic Constitution of India

The Republic Constitution of India came into effect from 26th January 1950. Article 343 of Chapter XVII of the Constitution of India states the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. But the Constituent Assembly of India have decided that English was to continue as official language for fifteen years,

from the commencement of the Constitution and thereafter Hindi should become the official language of the union. However, the Parliament was empowered to provide for the continued use of English for official purpose even after the expiry of said period. The constitutional provision of Part XVII related to official language of Indian Government, was interpreted by the extremist leaders of Hindi speaking states as the legal sanction for the imposition of Hindi on Non-Hindi States.¹³ Condemning this move the D.M.K. conducted several meetings and passed resolutions against the introduction of Hindi.

Madhava Menon, the then Union Education Minister passed an order on 2nd May 1950. According to the order, Hindi was made compulsory subject in all high schools. With this anti-Hindi agitation started once again in Madras State. The move of the agitation was very severe and hence the Central Government was forced to withdraw its order.¹⁴

Hindi Letter Erasing Agitation

On 26th July 1952 an executive meeting of D.M.K. was held at Madras and in that meeting it was resolved to erase Hindi letters from both the Railways and Postal departments with effect from August 1952. As per this resolution, C.N. Annadurai started to erase the Hindi letters name board of Erode Railway Junction using tar. His action was followed by his party men at various places in the State. i.e., R. Nedunchezian and M. Iyyasamy at Madurai, M. Karunanidhi, Nagoor Haneefa, M.S. Mani and S. Nedumaran at Tiruchi, N.V. Natarajan, C.N. Rajan, Ramamirtham Ammaiyar and Sathyavanimuthu at Egmore, Madras, K.A. Mathiazagan at Cuddalore, Kuthoosy Gurusamy, T.P. Vedachalam, Janardhanam, K.M. Subramaniam, Maniammai and many others participated in this Hindi letters erasing agitation. Nearly in 600 Railway stations the Hindi letters were erased.¹⁵

After this agitation, once again Hindi letters were written on the name boards of the railway stations. Hence E.V.R. decided to restart the agitation. D. K. conference was held at Manargudi in Thanjavur district on 12th July 1953. It was resolved at this conference, that again the Hindi letter erasing agitation will start from 1st August 1953. As per this resolution, E.V.R. along with thousands of his party members of D.K. erased the Hindi letter boards using tar at the Salem railway station. On the same day Kuthoosy Gurusamy at the Egmore railway station at Madras, T.P. Vedachalam at Tiruchi and A.P. Janardhanan at Tambaram participated in the Hindi letters defacing agitation. But there was no response from the government. Hence on 8th August 1954, E.V.R., and other D.K. cadres once again started this Hindi letters defacing agitation.¹⁶ On the morning of 1st August 1953 a batch of D.K., volunteers entered upon the Virudunagar Railway station platform with a view to erase the Hindi letters from the name boards. Their attempts to get near the boards were prevented by a batch of volunteers belonging to the local Youth Congress who had gathered there with the object of preventing any mischief being done to the boards. This led to an affray. The police who were on the spot arrested fourteen persons – seven from each group and laid charge – sheets against them in the court of the Additional First Class Magistrate, Virudunagar. All of them were convicted for an offence under section 160, Indian Penal Code. One of them was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for one month and the rest were sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 10/- each.¹⁷

A similar case of affray occurred at Sattur Railway station also on 1st August 1953 when a batch of D.K. volunteers, numbering eleven was prevented by another batch of local Youth Congress, volunteers, numbering fourteen from approaching the name boards.¹⁸ A clash ensued and to avoid a serious breach of the peace, the police arrested all the twenty five persons involved in the incident and laid charge sheets against them in the court of the Stationary Sub-Magistrate, Sattur. When the report about the incident was received by Government, it felt that since the offence committed by the accused were not serious, the prosecutions could be dropped. However, the eleven D.K. volunteers had pleaded guilty before the trying Magistrate who consequently sentenced each of them to a fine of Rs. 2 and in default to undergo simple imprisonment for two days.¹⁹ When they refused to pay the fine, the Magistrate committed them to prison and also issued distress warrants for the realization of the fine amount. While withdrawing the prosecution against the Youth Congress volunteers, which was still in pending

disposal, Government directed that not to press for the realization of the fine amount from the D.K. volunteers. Accordingly the court was moved to withdraw the distress warrants and it was good enough to do so.²⁰

On the morning of 15th August 1953 a batch of D.M.K. volunteers conducted Anti-Hindi demonstrations by erasing Hindi characters from the name boards at Tuticorin Railway Station platform. D.M.K. volunteers stopped a passenger train soon after starting from Tuticorin on 15th August at 6.25 a.m. four times before reaching Tuticorin -Melur station, two miles away by pulling the alarm communication chord. The police arrested thirty five persons and then the train moved. When the Prime Minister, Nehru arrived at Melur station there was a crowd of over one thousand persons on either side of the railway line shouting slogans "Down with Nehru Government". About 150 persons squatted on the railway lines and prevented the train from moving.²¹

The Government received telephonic information that the police had to open fire on two occasions when a crowd of demonstrators stopped a train near Tuticorin-Melur. It was stated that the mob was violent and indulged in stone throwing and that attempts at persuasion and a lathi charge proved ineffective and hence firing was ordered. The Collector and the District Magistrate, was ordered to present themselves on the spot. It was also stated that the police were compelled to fire on a second occasion and even after this, the mob moved to cause damage to the permanent way and create trouble and mischief in the town. As a result of the firing it was gathered that three persons died on the spot and one died on the way to the hospital, besides twenty – one persons were injured. In this particular case, the evidence of the Collector and the Additional District Magistrate, Tirunelveli formed the main part in the enquiry. Therefore the Government therefore decided to appoint C.A.Ramakrishnan, I.C.S. Collector of Madurai as Chairman and S.Maharajan, Sub-Judge, Tuticorin to conduct this enquiry.²²

The enquiry was to cover all the circumstances relating to the incidents that had happened at or 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 the press and all relevant evidences recorded from all persons including railway officials who had personal knowledge relating to these incidents.

All India Congress Conference was held at Avadi near Madras and in that conference it was insisted to introduce Hindi once again in Tamil Nadu. To oppose this move, E.V.R. announced a great agitation to be held on 1st August 1955. He also announced that during this agitation the Indian National Flag will be burnt. On behalf of the Central and State Governments, Kamaraj, the Chief Minister of Madras assured on 30th July 1955 that Hindi will not be introduced in Tamil Nadu against the wishes of the people.²³ Further he said that the name boards in the Railway station will be written in Tamil first, Hindi second and English third. Based on the assurance of the Chief Minister Kamaraj, E.V.R. dropped the plan of burning the National Flag.²⁴

To conclude, the Tamils were afraid about the imposition of Hindi and its imposition would affect the growth of their age-old Tamil language and the domination of the North Indians in their State. The Tamil scholars who strengthened the Dravidian parties and used them as their tools to ventilate their opposition against the imposition of Hindi. The Dravidian parties initiated many efforts to prevent the imposition of Hindi during the rule of the Congress in Madras State. They placed memorandums to the Congress Chief Minister of the Madras State and the Prime Minister of India. At last they involved in agitational politics. The erasing of boards which displayed the Hindi words, was one of their agitations which on the one hand attracted the attention of the Central Government to the core issue and on the other hand attracted the attention of the students and people of the Tamil Nadu who in en masse supported the stand of the Dravidian parties against the imposition of Hindi. Because of the Nehru assurance at the culmination of the issue the Hindi letter erasing agitation was called off. The death of Nehru was also a death blow to the agitators. The successor of Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri violated the Nehru's assurance which sparked violence in the anti-Hindi agitations at different places in Tamil Nadu, swallowing many valuable lives.

END NOTES

1. Gandhi, Rajmohan, **The Rajaji Story 1937 – 72**, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1984, p.114.
2. G.O.No. 1643, Education Department, 20 June 1948.
3. Alakarasan,T., **Hindi Ethirppu Varalaru**, (Tamil), Valanarasup Pathippagam, Chennai, 1985, p.26.
4. G.O.No. 1643, Education Department, 20 June 1948.
5. Ramasamy, A., **Enru Mudiyum Entha Mozhippor** (Tamil), Sembulam Publishing, Madurai, 1994, p.18.
6. Aladi Aruna, **Hindi Ekathippathiyam**, (Tamil), Mathivanan Publishing, Chennai, 1993, p. 69.
7. Ramsamy,A., **op.cit.**, p.19.
8. G.O.No. 1643, Education Department, 20 June 1948.
9. Aladi Aruna., **op.cit.**, p. 77.
10. Aasan,G.V.K., **Mozhi Urimai** (Tamil), Poongundram Pathippagam, Coimbatore, 1987, 19.
11. Ramasamy,A., **op.cit.**, p.9.
12. Barnett, M.R., **The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India**, University Press, Princeton, 1976, p.7.
13. **Ibid.**
14. Alakarasan, T., **op.cit.**, p.26.
15. Aladi Aruna, **op.cit.**, p.109.
16. Ramasamy, A., **Struggle for Freedom of Languages in India**, Puthuvasantham Pathippagam, Madurai, p.115.
17. Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, (M.L.A.D.), Vol.XVIII, 10 December 1954, p.709.
18. Fortnightly Reports, 28 August 1953.
19. G.O.No. 3147, Public Department, 3 December 1953.
20. M.L.A.D., Vol.XVIII, 10 December 1954, p.709.
21. G.O.No. 3122, Public Department, 28 November 1953.
22. G.O.No. 1870, Public Department, 15 July 1953
23. Aasan, G.V.K., **op.cit.**, p. 78.
24. Karunandam, **Anna Sila Ninaivugal**, (Tamil), Poovazha Pathippagam, Chennai, 1986, p.274.



P.Rajaganapathy

**Full-Time Ph.D. Research Scholar , Department of History , Presidency College
Chennai.**