

THE GENESIS OF THE DMK

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THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO DESCRIBE AND EXPLAIN THE genesis of the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*¹ which came into existence on September 17, 1949. Here we will focus mainly on political developments and socio-economic conditions in Tamil Nadu² from the middle of the last century till 1949. Specifically, the period under consideration involves an investigation of the emergence and evolution of the Non-Brahmin political movement and Dravidian separatism.

The Non-Brahmin political movement in Tamil Nadu represented essentially a strong reaction to the Brahmin dominance of the administrative, cultural, educational, political, and religious spheres. The domination and power enjoyed by the Brahmins was far out of proportion to their numerical strength. The basic objective of the Non-Brahmin political movement in the initial stages was to eradicate the "imbalance". In the later stages, particularly when the dynamic E. V. Ramasamy Naicker (hereafter referred to as Periyar)³ assumed the leadership of the movement, more radical postures and policies were adopted and the achievement of an independent sovereign federal republic of Dravidanadu consisting of the present Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Mysore became the principal objective of the movement.

Let us examine the extent of Brahmin dominance in some detail. In the field of education, their superiority was clearly established well before the present century and the level of literacy among them was proportionately much higher than among the Non-Brahmins in the Madras Presidency.⁴ One manifestation of this was the high educational "output" of that community. For example, although the Brahmin community constituted only about three per cent of the population, they formed the majority of the college educated in the Madras Presidency in the late 19th century. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 clearly illustrate this.

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¹ The *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*, or the Dravida Progressive Federation, will hereafter be referred to as the DMK. These initials are commonly used to refer to the party.

² After the DMK came into power in Madras State, the name of the latter was changed to Tamil Nadu.

³ E.V. Ramasamy Naicker was given the title "Periyar" (Elder) by the Tamil Nadu Women's Conference on November, 13, 1938. See R. Bhaskaran, *Sociology of Politics: Tradition and Politics in India* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967), p. 46.

⁴ Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 13-14.

TABLE 1.1—STUDENTS IN ARTS COLLEGES IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY IN 1890-1891

| <i>Community</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Brahmins | 69 |
| Other Hindus | 21 |
| Indian Christians | 8 |
| Muslims | 1 |
| Anglo-Indians & Europeans | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

(N=3,194)

Source: Table compiled from data provided by Mohan Ram, *Hindi Against India* (New Delhi: Rachna Prakashan, 1968), p. 70.

TABLE 1.2—GRADUATES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY FROM 1858 TO 1894

| <i>Community</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Brahmins | 69 |
| Other Hindus | 19 |
| Indian Christians | 8 |
| Eurasians & Europeans | 3 |
| Muslims | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

(N=3,483)

Source: *University of Madras Calendar for 1893-4*, Vol. 1, pp. 405-19.

Thus the total number of Brahmin students graduating from the University of Madras exceeded the sum total of graduating students from all other communities. The high percentage of Brahmin graduates was reflected in the composition of the government bureaucracy where the Brahmin community was highly over-represented. This was partly because, as the preceding statistics show, there were more college educated Brahmins than Non-Brahmins and this enabled the former to fill a sizeable portion of the posts in the government bureaucracy; also, because of their high educational qualifications, the Brahmins occupied about forty per cent of the "higher" posts open to Indians. Tables 1.3 and 1.4 illustrate the extent of Brahmin over-representation in the government bureaucracy.

TABLE 1.3—PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SERVICE POSTS HELD BY BRAHMINS, OTHER HINDUS, MUSLIMS, AND OTHERS IN 1872, 1881, AND 1886

| | 1872 | 1881 | 1886 |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| Brahmins | 28 | 30 | 19 |
| Other Hindus | 49 | 48 | 55 |

| | | | |
|---------|------------|------------|------------|
| Muslims | 14 | 13 | 17 |
| Others | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | (N=25,662) | (N=24,231) | (N=47,412) |

Source: Table compiled from data provided in *Madras Educational Proceedings*, Volume 3045, No. 386.

TABLE 1.4—PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SERVICE POSTS HELD BY BRAHMINS, OTHER HINDUS, MUSLIMS, AND OTHERS ACCORDING TO SALARY LEVELS IN 1886

| Community | % of total population | % of appointments paying more than Rs. 10 per month | % of appointments paying Rs. 10 and below per month |
|--------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| Brahmins | 4 | 42 | 4 |
| Other Hindus | 88 | 37 | 68 |
| Muslims | 6 | 6 | 24 |
| Others | 2 | 16 | 4 |
| Total | 100 | 101* | 100 |
| | | (N=28,750) | (N=18,662) |

* Round-off error

Source: Table compiled from data provided in the *Madras Educational Proceedings*, Volume 3045, No. 386.

Looking at the percentage of Other Hindus employed in the civil bureaucracy in the years 1872, 1881, and 1886, it is obvious that their representation is far below their numerical strength. Also, the table showing appointments paying ten rupees and below demands attention. The "Other Hindus" took up about sixty-eight per cent of the inferior appointments. The greater part of the inferior appointments was divided between the Muslims and the Non-Brahmin Hindus in the ratio of nearly one to three. In contrast, the Brahmins took up only four per cent of the inferior appointments.

H. E. Stokes, and Acting Secretary in the Government of Madras, made the following comment with regard to Brahmin over-representation in the government bureaucracy. He wrote in 1886:

The Government is unable to regard this increasing share of administration in the hands of a single class with entire approval. In certain departments (Settlement, Registration, Education, and Revenue), the Brahmins must be considered excessive. The Government, however, is most unwilling by these observations, to create the impression that they are hostile to the admission of Brahmins into the public service. The large share of public employment which that class had obtained is beyond doubt due to its own energy and ability, and it is impossible to ignore manifest superiority in considering the recruiting of the public service.⁵

⁵ *Madras Educational Proceedings*, Vol. 3045, No. 386, G.O., 27 July 1887.

The over-representation of Brahmins in the government bureaucracy continued without arousing serious and organized political opposition from the Non-Brahmin community till the early part of this century. According to Irschick, in 1912, out of the total 140 Deputy Collectors, 77 (55%) were Brahmins, and out of the total 128 District *munsifs*, 93 (72.6%) were Brahmins.⁶

In examining further this aspect of Brahmin dominance, we find that the political sphere was no exception. Their domination of the government bureaucracy gave them immense political influence and they were an important force in Madras politics partly because they formed the largest compact homogeneous group in the Legislative Council. According to Sir Alexander Cardew, a Madras civilian,

ever since 1893 Brahmin lawyers were the dominant element in the Legislative Council. Between 1893 and 1909 there were six official members of whom four were Brahmins and two were non-Brahmins. The same phenomenon persisted between 1909 and 1920 when the Morley-Minto Council functioned. Nine Indians were official members of whom eight were Brahmins. One-fifth of the total membership belonged to the Brahmins.⁷

The dominance of Madras politics by Brahmins was also reflected in the composition of the Madras Standing Congress Committee which was formed in 1888 to manage Congress affairs in South India. The Committee elected for 1890 had 12 Brahmins out of a total of 42.⁸ In September 1896, the Madras Standing Congress Committee was dissolved and its duties were transferred to the Madras Mahajana Sabha.⁹

The Brahmins were also preponderant in the committee of the Madras Mahajana Sabha, the most important political body in the region, which was founded in 1884 and affiliated to the Congress since the latter's formation in 1885. In 1885, 10 out of 29 members of the committee of the Madras Mahajana Sabha were Brahmins. In 1901, 18 out of 31 members of the committee were Brahmins, while in 1909 the figure was 19 out of 31.¹⁰

It is useful to examine briefly how this situation of Brahmin dominance came about. Under the caste system, the Brahmins were the highest and most sacred of the castes. Their religious superiority and economic power derived from landownership established the Brahmins at the apex of the societal pyramid.¹¹ Through strict observation of a set of rules, the Brahmins maintained their "religious purity". These rules prevented the free inter-

⁶ Irschick, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁷ S.N. Balasundaram, "The Dravidian (Non-Brahmin) Movement in Madras," in Iqbal Narain, ed., *State Politics in India* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1967), p. 167. fn. 1.

⁸ *Hindu*, January 25, 1890.

⁹ *Hindu*, November 28, 1896.

¹⁰ *Madras Almanac*, 1886, pp. 928-29; *Annual Report of the Madras Mahajana Sabha, for 1899 and 1900* (Madras, n.d.); and *Proceedings of the Madras Mahajana 1907-12*, MMS Office, Mount Road, Madras.

¹¹ For an interpretation of the way the South Indian Brahmin has maintained his social control over the other castes, see B.N. Nair, *The Dynamic Brahmin* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1959).

mingling of the Brahmins with the other caste groups because it was feared that this would "pollute" the "purity" of the Brahmins. Thus, caste affiliations fixed the parameters of their socialization process which further reinforced the rigid social hierarchy and resulted in each caste group evolving its own peculiar life styles. This social set-up was to have important cultural, economic, and political consequences later.

The Brahmin intellectual and cultural activity centered partly around the learning and mastery of the Vedic religious scripts (for example, the *Rigvedas*). This intellectual tradition enabled the Brahmins to assume a major portion of the appointments in the various levels of administration. Thus, the Brahmin dominance of the civil bureaucracy had existed since pre-British times and also before competitive examinations were introduced in 1858 by the British to break the stranglehold of the Mahratta Brahmins in the district administration of South India.

When British rule and English education were introduced, the Brahmins realized the potential advantage which a command of western education would give them, and here, their literary tradition gave them the initial advantage in adapting themselves to western education. The rapid expansion of western education in the Madras Presidency during the 1880's provided the Brahmins with greater opportunities to master the "master's" language.

Thus at the time when the Congress movement was getting underway, Madras offered greater provision for collegiate instruction than did Bengal despite the earlier lead of the latter Presidency in the field of higher education. Madras could claim over half of the aided colleges that arose in British India between 1881 and 1885, together with the largest share of peninsula-wide increase in collegiate instruction.¹²

Table 1.5 illustrates the lead which the Madras Presidency had in collegiate instruction.

TABLE 1.5—ARTS COLLEGES IN INDIA ACCORDING TO PROVINCES IN 1882

| PROVINCE | % |
|--|-----|
| 1. Madras | 39 |
| 2. Bengal | 34 |
| 3. North-West Frontier (modern Uttar Pradesh) | 14 |
| 4. Bombay | 9 |
| 5. Punjab | 3 |
| Total | 99* |

(N=64)

* Round-off error

Source: Table compiled from data provided by Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹² B.T. McCully, *English Education & the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 160.

This lead, in terms of more colleges, which the Madras Presidency had in the educational field is partly explained by the greater concentration of the educational activities of Christian missionaries in this Presidency than in the other areas. For example, in 1852, Madras had 1,185 mission schools with 38,055 students while Bombay and Bengal together had 472 mission schools with an enrolment of 26,791.¹³ A sizeable proportion of students in colleges and schools consisted of Brahmin students and Non-Brahmin (Hindu) representation was far below their numerical strength. Also, although the Non-Brahmin Hindu community constituted about eighty-eight per cent of the population, the percentage of Non-Brahmin Hindus graduating from the University of Madras from 1858 to 1894 was only 19. These can be seen in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

As far as Non-Brahmin Hindus were concerned, the small number of college educated members from their community meant few important jobs in the government bureaucracy for them which in turn meant less political influence and patronage. The under-representation of Non-Brahmin Hindus in educational institutions is probably explained by a combination of economic, cultural, and sociological factors.

A general concern for Brahmin preponderance in the government bureaucracy was first expressed by British officials. After examining in detail the actual proportion of appointments held by the various communities, Stokes came to the following conclusion. In 1886, at a time when the Congress was emerging as a political force demanding equality of treatment for Indians in the Indian Civil Service, Stokes wrote:

It is obviously inexpedient to permit any single class to monopolize the whole patronage of Government. An increase in the proportion of appointments held by the great non-Brahmin portion of the community would, therefore, be a ground for satisfaction.¹⁴

By this time, British officials in Madras were conceding that competition for administrative positions had not proved a success in so far as satisfying the claims of the major social groups in the region. However, only the Muslims had articulated their dissatisfaction with the competitive system, and argued for proportionate representation in the government bureaucracy. Mir Shujaat Ali Khan, a statutory civilian in the Madras Government, testified before the Public Service Commission in 1887:

It is further of great importance politically that the sects forming the population of a province should be sufficiently represented in its administration with due regard, of course, to efficiency.¹⁵

During the 1890s, the Madras Government began to correct the "imbalance" by modifying competition for the posts of Deputy Collectors.

¹³ Mohan Ram, *Hindi Against India* (New Delhi: Rachna Prakashan, 1968), p. 70.

¹⁴ *Madras Educational Proceedings*, Vol. 3045, No. 386, G.O., July 27, 1887.

¹⁵ See *Proceedings of the Public Service Commission*, Vol. 5, Section 2, Evidence of Mir Shujaat Ali, p. 32.

The continued dominance of the Brahmins in the various spheres into the early decades of the present century aroused the jealousy and hatred of the Non-Brahmin community who increasingly became conscious of their political and economic inferiority. Also, the ritual arrogance and discrimination pursued by the Brahmins of South India hurt Non-Brahmin sensibilities and contributed to the emergence of a general climate of animosity toward the Brahmins.¹⁶ The preoccupation of Brahmins with ritual and social purity offended Non-Brahmin's self-respect at a time when western education and the new professions were creating avenues for social mobility while the Congress and other organizations were proclaiming the ideal of equality. It is perhaps worth labouring the point in the South than in other parts of India, and Non-Brahmins who had visited Bombay and/or Bengal were struck at the lack of concern for such taboos in these places.¹⁷ Not surprisingly then caste rivalries intruded more overtly in the politics of South India than anywhere else.

Among the Non-Brahmin community, there gradually emerged a "counter-elite" (consisting principally of politically articulate, urban-based intellectuals) who were cognizant of the plight of their community and were motivated towards redressing their grievances. According to Hardgrave, the Non-Brahmin elites were aware of the vital role of education as the base of the Brahmins' virtual monopoly of the government bureaucracy, and they attempted to uplift their communities first through education.¹⁸

The Dravidian Association

One of the first Non-Brahmin institutions to be established in this century in Tamil Nadu was "The Dravidian Association," which was inaugurated in 1912. The Raja of Panagal, Dr. T.M. Nair, and C. Nadesa Mudaliar were elected President, Vice-President, and Secretary respectively, of the Association.

¹⁶ A correspondent, signing himself as "X", wrote to the *Hindu* of September 7, 1905, complaining that in Tinnevely Brahmins would not allow Sudras who were vegetarians by birth to draw water from their wells, nor allow them to live in their midst. He described the treatment of the lower castes as "shameful" and called for the ending of the caste system: "If the higher castes heedless of the warnings of history maintain absurd privileges and thus cause heartburning and hatred among the lower castes, then India will as now remain divided."

¹⁷ Minachiayya, in a letter to the editor of the *Hindu* published on 28 November 1901, wrote that in Bombay rules about inter-caste dining were ignored so long as food was cooked by servants belonging to higher castes. Many Congressmen from the South who attended sessions in Bombay had this experience, but this was not the case in South India where inter-caste dining restrictions were still rigorously observed. Many Non-Brahmins viewed such restrictions with "bitterness".

¹⁸ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1965), p. 12. In June 1916, a hostel for Non-Brahmin students was established in Madras City. The rationale for setting up this hostel was that Non-Brahmin students were unable to secure proper hostel accommodations in Madras City because of caste discrimination. The establishment of this hostel provided a meeting ground for Non-Brahmin students. It was founded by C. Nadesa Mudaliar who was then a medical student in Madras and also the Secretary of the Madras Dravidian Association.

The Dravidian Association did not adopt an anti-colonial posture like the Indian National Congress. On the contrary, the leaders of the Association thought that Non-Brahmin interests would be best served if they cooperated with the British rulers and operated within the colonial framework. In this manner, they hoped to gain concessions for the Non-Brahmins from the British. Their political objective, according to Hardgrave, was "to safeguard the political, social, and economic interests of the Dravidian people" and "its [the Association's] declared aspiration was the establishment of a Dravidian State under the British Raj—a government of, by, and for the non-Brahmin."¹⁹ However, the Association proved to be a political failure. It did not succeed in mobilizing the great mass of the Non-Brahmins to its cause. Also, elite rivalry within the Association, particularly between the two prominent Non-Brahmin politicians, Sir P. Thiagaraya Chetty and Dr. T.M. Nair, further undermined the effectiveness of the Association.

The South India People's Association

Following the failure of the Dravidian Association, a joint stock company called "The South Indian People's Association, Ltd.," was formed for the purpose of publishing newspapers to voice Non-Brahmin grievances. Sir P. Thiagaraya Chetty was elected the Secretary of the Association. The Association started publishing newspapers in both English and Dravidian languages. The three prominent newspapers were: *Justice* (English); *Dravidian* (Tamil); and *Aanthira Prakasini* (Telugu). The *Justice* was the official organ of the Association and the inaugural edition appeared on February 26, 1917.

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto

In 1916, Sir P. Thiagaraya Chetty, Secretary of the South India People's Association, issued the famous "Non-Brahmin Manifesto". It represented an important ideological statement of the Non-Brahmin elite. It led to the founding of, and provided the ideological basis for, a political party, the South India Liberal Federation, in August 1917. The manifesto analyzed the problems of the Non-Brahmin community, suggested possible solutions, and emphasized the urgent need for Non-Brahmins to organize themselves to make their voices heard.²⁰

The manifesto contained three essential points. Firstly, it highlighted the over-representation of Brahmins in educational institutions, government bureaucracy, and Legislative Councils. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, the manifesto demanded reserved seats for Non-Brahmins in the legislative council as the first step.

¹⁹ *Loc. cit.*

²⁰ Published in the *Hindu*, December 20, 1916.

Secondly, it called for the "re-discovery of the non-Brahmin's self-respect".²¹ This later found organizational expression in the Self-Respect Movement.

Thirdly, it opposed the Brahmin demand for Home Rule. The Non-Brahmin elites thought that, under the prevailing circumstances, the removal of British power would mean Brahmin political dominance over them. As a result, the manifesto argued for continued British rule. The manifesto declared:

We are not in favour of any measure which, in operation, is designed, or tends completely, to determine the influence and authority of the British Rulers, who alone in the present circumstances of India are able to hold the scales even between creed and class and to develop that sense of unity and national solidarity without which India will continue to be a congeries of mutually exclusive and warring groups without a common purpose and a common patriotism.²²

The "pro-British rule" attitude of these Non-Brahmin elites led many nationalists and leaders of the Congress movement (many of whom in Madras were Brahmins) to assert that the Non-Brahmin movement was really a British idea to counteract the agitation for self-government and to consolidate and perpetuate British colonialism, and that therefore, these Non-Brahmin elites were really "puppets" of the British colonialists.

The Justice Party

After the issuing of the "Non-Brahmin Manifesto", a decision was taken to form a political party which would be principally concerned with the safeguarding and advancement of the political interests of the Non-Brahmin community. This led to the founding, in August 1917, of the South India Liberal Federation, which was to function alongside the South India Peoples' Association. The defeat of a Non-Brahmin candidate in the provincial elections in Madras, which were held under the Morley-Minto scheme of 1909, because the Brahmins in that constituency had not supported him is believed to be the immediate reason for the founding of the South India Liberal Federation.²³ Although the official name of the party was the South India Liberal Federation, the party was popularly referred to as "The Justice Party" because of the popularity of its official organ, the *Justice*.

The Justice Party was fairly successful in its attempts to advance the political and socio-economic interests of the Non-Brahmin community. It also succeeded in checking the Brahmin dominance of the political system to a great extent. It achieved these by capturing political power in the elections held under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of 1919 and introducing statutory measures that curbed Brahmin influence and advanced Non-Brahmin interests.

²¹ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²² *Hindu*, December 20, 1916.

²³ Bhaskaran, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the first legislative council elections were held on November 20, 1920. In that election, the Justice Party was returned with a big majority because the Congress had boycotted the elections.²⁴ The Justice Party formed the first cabinet in the Madras Presidency. In the second elections in 1923, the Swarajist wing of the Congress participated because it wanted to destroy the Constitution "from within", but the Justice Party, once again emerged victorious in the elections. In the third elections held in 1926, the Swarajists defeated the Justice Party but they refused to form a ministry. As a result, an Independent cabinet led by Dr. P. Subbarayan was formed. The Congress, under Gandhi's leadership, again boycotted the fourth council elections, held in 1930, and this resulted in the Justice Party making a clean sweep at the polls. However, by 1934, the Congress had withdrawn its boycott of council elections, and in the 1934 council elections, it routed the Justice Party by winning every seat it contested. From then onwards, the Justice Party rapidly declined as a significant electoral force because of a number of factors. Firstly, it was overshadowed by the Congress party with its dynamic leadership and all-India nationalist appeal. Secondly, the Justice Party's elitist character (consisting mainly of princes, *zamindars*, and wealthy upper caste Non-Brahmin intellectuals) and the failure to develop a mass base affected it adversely. Thirdly, elite rivalry within the party further undermined its effectiveness.

One of the major political gains of the Justice Party was that it, like the Muslim League, agitated for, and succeeded in obtaining, separate electorates for Non-Brahmins. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms which were embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919 provided for the reservation of seats for Non-Brahmins in the provincial legislative council. Of the total 98 elected seats, 28 were to be reserved for Non-Brahmins. According to Mohan Ram,

there is an interesting difference in principle between the award of separate electorates for the non-Brahmins and the others. Muslims, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians were minorities in relation to the Hindu majority and were given separate electorates to safeguard their minority interests. But non-Brahmins were a majority *vis-a-vis* the Brahmins. It was extraordinary, the extension of protection to the majority against the minority.²⁵

According to Balasundaram,

[T]he system of separate electorates strengthened the non-Brahmin complex—a peculiar parallel to the separatist trends that emanated from similar provisions for Muslims.²⁶

The Justice Party's demand for the establishment of quotas which would increase Non-Brahmin representation in the bureaucracy was also accepted

²⁴ The boycott of the legislative council elections was part of the "Non-cooperation" campaign of the All-India Congress Party against British rule in India. See B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958).

²⁵ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁶ Balasundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

and implemented by the government. In 1922, the Madras government issued an order regulating public service appointments on a communal basis. It prescribed the following ratio for different communities:²⁷

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Non-Brahmins | 5 |
| 2. Brahmins | 2 |
| 3. Muslims | 2 |
| 4. Anglo-Indians, Christians, including Europeans | 2 |
| 5. Others, including the depressed classes | 2 |
| | 13 |

According to Balasundaram, "the communal G.O., . . . made the Brahmins in Tamilnad look like Jews of mediaeval Europe."²⁸

"Suya Mariyaathai Yiyakkam" and Periyar

While the Justice Party was exerting political pressure at the governmental level, there was another dynamic Non-Brahmin movement making its impact felt strongly at the mass level. This was the famous *Suya Mariyaathai Yiyakkam* or the Self-Respect Movement founded by Periyar in 1926. A general understanding of the political socialization, orientations, and ideological convictions of Periyar is necessary for understanding both the Self-Respect Movement and the later transformation of the Non-Brahmin movement from an elitist to a mass based movement. However, such a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, only the more important aspects of Periyar's political life will be examined.

Periyar was born on September 17, 1879 at Erode in Madras State, as the second son of a fairly rich and pious contractor. His schooling was limited to primary education, and he married at the young age of thirteen. When he was nineteen years old, he became a *sanyaasi* and travelled to many parts of India, particularly the centres of Hindu pilgrimage. During these visits, he was well exposed to the various aspects of Hindu ritual practices and social customs in other parts of India. As a consequence of these, a radical transformation in the religious views and social and political attitudes of Periyar took place. He was thoroughly disillusioned with the superstitious religious beliefs, the activities of Brahmin priests, and many other acts carried out in the name of religion. He interpreted these acts as attempts by a few to fool and exploit the masses. He remarked:

There are temples in India whose annual incomes run into crores, and they are wasted on useless rituals and for the special benefit and aggrandisement of a few exploiters. . . . If the money and energy spent on superstitious beliefs had

²⁷ *Loc. cit.* The error of addition in the original has been corrected.

²⁸ *Loc. cit.*

been diverted to popular education, should we have the lowest percentage literacy in this holy land of ours? The ultimate source of our illiteracy, poverty, and disease, is superstition.²⁹

On returning to Erode, Periyar involved himself actively in politics with a strong commitment to bringing about a more rational and just society.

Periyar's strong opposition to the caste system, particularly the Brahmin high caste, and his support for widow re-marriage made him the arch enemy of the Brahmins in general. However, his popularity among the Non-Brahmin community increased and he was elected the Chairman of the Erode Municipal Council in 1918.

In 1919, Periyar joined the Congress Party and in the following year, he participated in the famous "Non-Cooperation" movement and was jailed twice. He campaigned vigorously for prohibition and demonstrated in front of toddy shops, and also urged the people to use *khadi*. His popularity within the Congress increased and he was elected Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.

During the next few years, the tempo of Periyar's political activity further increased but many of his actions and proposals aroused the anger and opposition of the Brahmin leadership of the Congress. Firstly, his *satyagraha* at Vaikom (Travancore State) for the Harijan (untouchable) right to enter Hindu temples aroused Brahmin opposition. In recognition of this act, Periyar is still referred to as the "Hero of Vaikom."

Secondly, Periyar ridiculed the "classics" of Hinduism as fairy tales and pointed out that they were absolutely irrelevant in the modern context. He remarked:

The miraculous incidents with which the puranas are replete, are, as you all know, beyond human comprehension and utterly devoid of reality and practicality, and therefore outside the range of repetition in the modern age.³⁰

Periyar went beyond his verbal attacks of the Hindu religious "classics". In 1922, he suggested the burning of *Manu* and the *Ramayana* to the Congress Party.³¹ This greatly aroused Brahmin antipathy towards Periyar.

Periyar, then Secretary of the Congress Party, despite strong Brahmin opposition, contested for the presidentship of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. Periyar succeeded in defeating the other contender (a Brahmin) by a narrow margin but before he could assume office, a Brahmin leader successfully moved a motion of no-confidence in Periyar. One of Periyar's supporters later charged that the no-confidence motion was introduced "only because he [Periyar] is not a Brahman."³²

²⁹ E.V.R. Periyar, *Social Reform or Social Revolution?* (Madras: Viduthalai Publications, 1965), pp. 16-17. Translated by A.M. Dharmalingam.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹ Bhaskaran, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³² Quoted in Selig S. Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 122.

Despite the successful no-confidence vote against him, Periyar did not leave the Congress Party and began championing Dravidian causes within the Congress. Periyar argued that the Congress Party should urge the government to enforce the principle of communal representation in order to uplift the Dravidian peoples. To this effect, he introduced resolutions at the Congress conferences at Tirunelveli (1920), at Thanjavur (1921), at Thiruppur (1922), at Salem (1923), and at Thiruvannamalai (1924). Although Periyar's resolutions had the support of a significant number of the rank-and-file, it did not win the approval of the leadership of the party and as a result, they were not passed. The final confrontation came at the Congress conference at Conjeevaram in November 1925 when Periyar's resolution was again defeated. Periyar was so thoroughly disillusioned with the Congress and he resigned in the same year. He attacked the Congress party as an organization that was dominated by, and served the interests of, Brahmins and argued that Dravidians could not secure any benefits through that organization. He pledged to bring about the destruction of the Congress.³³

In 1926, Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement. Some Non-Brahmin elites participated in the movement and played an important role in spreading the creed of the movement. On February 17-18, 1929, the first Self-Respect Youth Association was started, and C.N. Annadurai, a Pachaiyappa College student, took an active part in the various debates and activities organized by this youth body.

The general objective of the Self-Respect Movement was to strive for equal rights and opportunities for everyone in the political, economic, social, and other spheres of life.³⁴ Specifically, the members of the movement were committed to putting an end to the social system based on the caste system, superstitious religious beliefs and practices, and the exploitation of the masses by the Brahmin priests. The Self-Respectors also denounced child marriage and enforced widowhood. Periyar left no one in doubt that the Self-Respect Movement was essentially anti-Brahmin and the priest who "presided" at religious ceremonies was a principal target of ridicule and denunciation. The following Tamil papers, *Kudiyarasu* (Republic), *Pagutharivu* (Rationalism), *Viduthalai* (Liberation), and *Puratchi* (Revolt), played an important role in spreading the "ideology" of the Self-Respect Movement.

Periyar's religio-political thinking during this period was greatly influenced by the ideas of Robert Ingersoll and Periyar translated many of Ingersoll's writings into Tamil. Mohan Ram has interpreted the Self-Respect Movement as follows:

³³ A. Maraimalaiyaan, *Pararingar Annavin Peruvazhvu* (Great Scholar Anna's Great Life) (Madras: Vaanathi Pathippagam, 1969), p. 83. C.N. Annadurai is popularly referred to as "Anna" (Elder Brother).

³⁴ See *Memorandum and Articles of Association of The Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution* (Tiruchi: The Noble Press, n.d.).

It was the rationalism of the Robert Ingersoll type in revolt against the thraldom of ritualistic religion in general and the caste system which Hinduism had sanctified, in particular.³⁵

The Self-Respect Movement did not succeed in securing the support of many Non-Brahmin intellectuals partly because of its vague atheistic orientation. However, the support it obtained from the lower caste groups, particularly the Harijans, was tremendous and beyond expectations, and generally, it contributed to the broadening of the politically relevant strata of the population.

Periyar and The Justice Party

In the early 1930's, Periyar undertook a tour of Europe visiting both Soviet Russia and the fascist countries. The objective of the trip, according to Periyar, was to study communism.³⁶ The political ideology, economic policies, social organizations, and mobilization techniques of the Soviet regime impressed Periyar greatly. On his return to India in 1931, he translated *The Communist Manifesto* into Tamil. The Marxian materialistic interpretation of history was basically in accord with his political thinking and he was convinced that materialism was the answer to India's problems. Also, his visit to the totalitarian countries increased his revolutionary fervour and he advocated the overthrow of the government through revolutionary violence. His political extremism led to his imprisonment in 1933 on a charge of sedition and he was released the following year.

After his release, Periyar wanted to continue his political activities through one of the existing major political parties, but was not prepared to compromise his political convictions. He formulated a set of proposals known as the "Fourteen Points Erode Programme" and presented it to both the Justice and Congress parties for their consideration. He agreed to join either of these parties if it accepted his proposals. The Congress Party rejected the proposals because they conflicted with its own all-India ideology. But the Justice Party, which was rapidly declining as a political force, and was riddled with factionalism, accepted Periyar's proposals in the hope that his dynamic leadership might lead to its revitalization.

The issue that brought Periyar to the forefront of the Non-Brahmin political movement was C. Rajagopalachari's (leader of Madras Congress ministry and a Brahmin) plan to introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools in 1938. Rajagopalachari's attempts to force Hindi in schools in Madras was interpreted by many Tamils as a calculated affront to Tamil culture and its great literary heritage, and as part of a wider plan by the Aryan North to subjugate the Tamil peoples. There was widespread popular protest against compulsory Hindi in schools and Periyar, who played a leading role in this anti-Hindi campaign, was jailed. This further enhanced

³⁵ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁶ Lloyd Rudolph, "Urban Life and Populist Radicalism: Dravidian Politics in Madras," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 20:3 (May 1961), p. 287.

his political standing and while in jail, he was elected President of the Justice Party. The widespread popular protest and the death of two anti-Hindi campaigners, Thalamuthu and Nadarajan, in police firings forced the government to change Hindi from a compulsory to an optional subject in schools.

The Madras Congress government's retreat on Hindi did not lead to a reduction in the tempo of the anti-Hindi campaign. On the contrary, it increasingly led to the adoption of extremist political postures by Periyar and his followers and Tamil patriots in general. In the Justice Party convention of 1938, the "Tamil Nadu for Tamils" resolution was adopted. C.N. Annadurai figured prominently in the passing of this resolution. The "Tamil Nadu for Tamils" demand was not for an independent sovereign state. The Justice Party wanted a Tamil Nadu that would be directly under the Secretary of State for India in London and not under the Viceroy in New Delhi. According to Mohan Ram,

The meaning of the demand was clear. The Tamil [*sic*] did not have any common destiny with the rest of India and even if they could not get independence immediately, they should part company with the north immediately.³⁷

However, in the following year, at the "Dravidanadu Conference" organized by Periyar, the limited "Tamil Nadu for Tamils" demand was replaced by a demand for the creation of a separate and independent sovereign federal republic of Dravidanadu. The desired federal polity was to include the present states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Mysore and each unit was to have residual powers and autonomy in internal administration. The basic assumption of the Dravidanadu demand was that the Aryans and Dravidians were of different racial stocks and that there were fundamental cultural differences between them. Although the Dravidanadu demand was vague, lacking in basis, and self-contradictory in many respects, Periyar and his lieutenants did their utmost to mobilize mass support for the Dravidanadu demand. The political battleline was now drawn in terms of "Aryan versus Dravidian". Despite the intensive propaganda efforts of Periyar and his followers, they never succeeded in mobilizing "Dravidian nationalism" among the populace of the four Southern states because of the "internal contradictions" of the movement. The Dravidanadu movement remained essentially a Tamil movement.

The Salem Conference of 1944

While the Dravidanadu movement was underway, important changes were also taking place within the Justice Party and they reached their climax in 1944, a year which represents a major landmark in the evolution of the Non-Brahmin political movement. It was in this year that the historic Salem conference of the Justice Party was held. At that time, Annadurai was the Secretary-General of the Justice Party, having succeeded Visuwanatham who

³⁷ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

had earlier resigned from the post because of political differences with Periyar. Annadurai played a leading and decisive role in the conference. According to Balasundaram, the conference proved to be a battleground between the conservative and radical sections of the party.³⁸ Sir P.T. Rajan, C.G. Netto, Rathinasamy, Thirumalaisamy, T.R. Kothandarama Mudaliar, T. Thamotheeram Naidu, Visuwanatham, T.A.V. Nathan and P. Balasubramaniam were some of the prominent personalities in the "conservative" faction. The radical faction was led by Periyar and Annadurai.

In order to effectively meet the political challenge posed by the Indian National Congress, the radicals argued that the Justice Party had to be reorganized and given a new orientation. Also, the radicals pointed out that if they were to achieve their political objective of Dravidanadu, the party had to cease being elitist and become mass based, with leadership in the hands of those who had close contacts and identification with the masses.

Specifically, in the Salem conference, the "conservative-radical" elite rivalry centered around the famous "Annadurai resolutions."³⁹ The important resolutions tabled by Annadurai urged the following: (1) the immediate renunciation of honorary titles, that were conferred by the British, by all those who had received them and they and others were not to accept such titles or awards from the British in the future; (2) the dropping of caste suffixes to personal names; and (3) the adoption of a new name, the *Dravidar Kazhagam* (DK), for the South India Liberal Federation ("the Justice Party"). The resolutions reflected the desire of the "radicals" to achieve a "casteless society", to demonstrate that they were not and would not be the lackeys of British colonialism, and generally to give the party a new orientation.

The "Annadurai resolutions" were the focus of intense debate within the "subjects committee" of the Justice Party. The conservatives tried their utmost to defeat or alter substantially the contents of the resolutions. One of the reasons for their opposition to the resolutions was that they would lose many of the special privileges and concessions which they were getting (partly because their titles carried some "influence") from the British if the resolutions were passed and implemented. The "subjects committee" of the party discussed the resolutions and other matters for thirty-five hours, and thirty-five year old Annadurai played a decisive role in ensuring that his resolutions emerged from the "subjects committee" unaltered, and in the actual conference, it was unanimously passed.⁴⁰

It is necessary to examine the significance and consequences of the passing of the "Annadurai resolutions". The most important consequence was it led to a split in the Justice Party. According to Mohan Ram,

³⁸ Balasundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

³⁹ T.M. Parthasarathy, *Thi. Mu. Ka. Varalaaru 1916-1960* (D.M.K. History 1916-1960) (Madras: Paari Nilaiyam, 1967), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁰ Maraimalaiyaan, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-128.

The Justice Party's break was inevitable. At the Salem Conference in 1944 there was little doubt that it was largely a Tamil party, with very little non-Tamil participation.⁴¹

The radical elites who commanded the majority support reorganized the party. Thus, the DK under the dynamic leadership of Periyar came into existence. According to Balasundaram,

The non-Brahmin leadership passed on to men who held rather extremist ideas about society, religion and politics and actively sought the support of non-Brahmin sections, like the Naickers, Nadars, Mukkulathors and Adi-Dravida untouchables.⁴²

The conservative orthodox group led by Sir P.T. Rajan left the movement but continued to call itself the "Justice Party". It continued to adhere to its commitment to the idea of a *Dravidasthan*. It also reiterated its faith in caste representations in public services, legislatures, and educational institutions until the ultimate objective of a "casteless society" was achieved.⁴³ However, the party became increasingly irrelevant in Tamil Nadu politics. It won only one seat (Sir P.T. Rajan's) in the 1952 local legislative elections and lost even that in 1957.

The resolution calling on party members to drop caste suffixes in their personal names had an impact on many party leaders, members, and youths. From then onwards, it became difficult to identify the caste affiliations of such persons from their names. It represented a symbolic gesture on their part to advance the cause of a "casteless society". In some cases, they adopted new Tamil names; for example, Narayanasamy became Nedunchezian and Ramayya became Anbazhagan.

The Salem Conference represented a personal political triumph for Annadurai. His defense of Periyar's leadership won him the praise of many. The passing of the "Annadurai resolutions" increased his prestige tremendously and clearly established him as the most important political leader, next only to Periyar, in the Non-Brahmin political movement and also as the leading ideologue and spokesman of the party and Dravidian separatism. He also had a large personal following among the youth.

The DK, which came into existence immediately after the Salem Conference, held its first party conference at Tiruchi in 1945 and adopted black flag with a red circle in the centre as its symbol.⁴⁴ Organizational units of the DK were set up at village, *taluk*,⁴⁵ and district levels. The DK elaborated the anti-Brahmin theme of earlier Non-Brahmin political organizations but with greater militancy. Specifically, it attacked the injustices of the Hindu caste system which was an important theme of the earlier Self-Respect Move-

⁴¹ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁴² Balasundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁴³ Bhaskaran, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Black to symbolise the subjugation of Dravidians and red circle symbolising the hope of the downtrodden Dravidians. The circle was to expand to fill the darkness all round until the flag was red.

⁴⁵ The *taluk* is an administrative unit below the district level.

ment. However, its major political objective was the achievement of a sovereign independent Dravidanadu and the energies of the party members were directed toward promoting this cause. Also, in order to rid the party of the "pro-British" image of the Justice Party, Periyar called upon his followers to renounce all titles conferred by the British colonial regime and to quit the National War Front.

In order to mobilize anti-Brahmin, anti-caste system, anti-Hindi and anti-North sentiments and to promote a feeling of Dravidian identity, the party launched a "cultural offensive" on many fronts. Widow re-marriage, inter-caste marriage, and "reform marriages" were encouraged. No member was allowed to wear the sectarian marks of faith across his forehead. Furthermore, the Hindu mythological figures were ridiculed and Hindu religious idols were destroyed. The Hindu religious epics also became targets of attack. For example,

The *Kamba Ramayanam*, a classic in Tamil literature sacred to Tamil Vaishnavites, was described as an attempt to glorify the Aryan, his culture, his superiority, his ideas, and also as an attempt to undermine the Dravidian South and its hero, Ravana. By way of a protest against this, the burning of *Kamba Ramayanam* in public was advocated.⁴⁶

There was also a conscious attempt to revive the Tamil literary classics, to popularize a new literary style, and to "purify" the Tamil language from Sanskritic "pollution". According to A.C. Chettiar, it was estimated that in 1900, nearly fifty per cent of the words in the written language were Sanskritically influenced. Fifty years later, its influence had been reduced to only twenty per cent.⁴⁷

The political goals, strategies, and the "cultural offensive" of the DK were exerting a tremendous influence on the social and political life of Tamil Nadu. The attempts by the DK to glorify the political and life of past of the Tamils, the radical political postures of Periyar, the oratorical abilities of Annadurai and the felicity of his prose style, the forceful writings of other party members and sympathisers proved to be crucial magnets for attracting mass support and also in creating a sense of identity and "political community" among the Tamils. The party was particularly successful in securing support for its objectives and activities from many Tamil youths. Among the active youth members of the party who later went on to play important roles in the political life of Tamil Nadu were E.V.K. Sampath, Nedunchezhiyan, Anbashagan, and Karunanithi.

As the DK was making deeper inroads in the political arena of Tamil Nadu, very important changes were taking place within the party. There was increasing dissatisfaction with Periyar's political leadership mainly among the younger members of the party. Periyar's chief lieutenant, Annadurai, was the leader and spokesman of the younger generation of the party.

⁴⁶ Balasundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁴⁷ Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Although there was a general consensus on political objectives between Periyar and Annadurai and their respective followers, there were basic disagreements between them on the methods of achieving their common objectives and also on other intra-party matters. These were the basic causes of the intra-party rivalry which developed a few years after the founding of the party. It must be pointed out that although the role of personal political ambition cannot be discounted in an analysis of any political rivalry, there were important differences in viewpoints on substantive issues between the two leaders and their respective followers. In the following paragraphs, we will examine in some detail the nature of Periyar-Annadurai relations and their political differences.

Periyar-Annadurai relations were similar in many ways to a guru-disciple relationship.⁴⁸ In fact, Annadurai, on many occasions, had publicly stated that Periyar was the only person whom he had accepted as leader in public life. Similarly, Periyar, on various occasions, indicated that Annadurai would be his successor, and in the Erode Conference of the party on October 23-24, 1948, he publicly stated that he was handing over the "keys" to Annadurai because his old age did not permit an active role in the political arena of Tamil Nadu any longer.⁴⁹ Annadurai's disciple-like admiration and Periyar's guru-like response seemed to indicate that the relationship between these two men was based on deep personal attachments and that this was going to be a permanent relationship. However, a year after the Erode Conference, the "disciple" left the "guru" and became one of the founder members of the DMK.

"Party Uniform"

The issue of "party uniform" became a point of political controversy between Periyar and Annadurai. Just before independence, Periyar organized the *Karuppu Sattai Thondar Padai* or the Black Shirt Volunteer Corps.⁵⁰ According to Rudolph, "some of the inspiration for the Black Shirts may have come from Naicker's European tour in the early thirties when he visited both the fascist countries and Soviet Russia."⁵¹ The Black Shirt Volunteer Corps was part of the organizational set-up of the DK and was supposed to be made up of full-time workers. It was formed "to strengthen the *Dravidar Kazhagam*"⁵² and gave the party a militant character. Maraimalaiyaan gives two reasons for the use of black shirts by members of the unit: firstly, "to identify those people who were prepared to make any kind of sacrifice";

⁴⁸ Maraimalaiyaan, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁵⁰ A resolution was passed at the DK conference held at Tiruchi in 1945 to form the Black Shirt Volunteer Corps. The resolution also specified that only members of this organization were to wear black shirts. See P.V.R. Pandiyan, *Aringar Anna Vazhkai Varalaaru* (Scholar Anna's Life History) (Madurai: Kalaipponi, 1969), p. 24.

⁵¹ Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

⁵² Maraimalaiyaan, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

and secondly, "to symbolise the downtrodden conditions of the Dravidians".⁵³

Annadurai did not raise any objections to the *Karuppu Sattai Thondar Padai*. Periyar, however, increasingly argued that all party members should wear black shirts.⁵⁴ Those who did not abide by this directive of Periyar increasingly came to be regarded as "traitors" and "enemies" of the party by some members.⁵⁵ Annadurai disagreed. His argument was as follows: "A policeman wears his 'khaki' uniform only when he is on duty. Similarly, black shirts should only be worn by members when they participated in political agitations". He pointed out that, at times, a party member or anyone wearing a black shirt may be engaged in an activity which was inconsistent with the party principles. In such a situation, it was highly likely that the public would associate the person concerned with the DK and ultimately the image of the party would be adversely affected.⁵⁶ However, Periyar did not change his initial decision.

On May 1946, a conference of the Black Shirt Volunteer Corps was convened at Madurai with Periyar as chairman and Annadurai also participated. On the second day of the conference, some anti-DK elements set fire to the conference *panthal* (stage) and the meeting ended in confusion. At this time, the Congress party which was in power declared that the Black Shirt Volunteer Corps was an illegal organization. In order to condemn the government's action, Periyar organized a public meeting at the Memorial Hall in Madras. Prior to this meeting, the executive committee of the party was to meet at Periyar's house in Meeraan Sahib Road in Madras. Periyar issued a directive that all those attending the two meetings must wear black shirts to symbolize their opposition to the government's action. One of the interesting questions posed then was whether Annadurai, given his objection to wearing black shirts, would attend the two meetings. However, to the surprise of many, Annadurai was given a tremendous welcome when he attended the meetings wearing a black shirt.

Attitude Towards India's Independence

India was finally freed from about two hundred years of colonial bondage and became a sovereign independent state on August 14, 1947. In general, this represented the beginnings of the end of colonialism in Afro-Asia. In particular, it was a day of national rejoicing for the Indian National Congress leaders and other freedom fighters. However, within the DK, the significance of "August 15, 1947" was a point of political controversy between the top two leaders of the party and their respective followers.

⁵³ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ Parthasarathy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁶ Maraimalaiyaan, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

As Independence was approaching, Periyar warned his fellow Dravidians that "we must guard against transference of power from one British to the Aryans".⁵⁷ In his attempt to achieve a Dravidanadu, Periyar sought the political support of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the *Quaid-e-Azam*, and the Muslim League so that Dravidanadu might be formed simultaneously with Pakistan but the latter's support was not forthcoming. Also, the British ignored the Dravidanadu demand. This led Periyar to declare (without consulting the party) "August 15, 1947" as a day of mourning for Dravidians and he called on them to boycott Independence Day celebrations. He argued that the departure of British colonialism meant the subjugation of the Dravidians to the political, economic, and religious imperialism of the Aryans.

Annadurai, however, gave a different interpretation of the significance of "August 15, 1947". As Hardgrave puts it, he saw "national independence as the accomplishment of all India, not merely the Aryan North."⁵⁸ Annadurai argued that the exit of British colonialism meant the removal of one of the triple "enemies" of the Dravidians and therefore "August 15, 1947" was a day of rejoicing for the Dravidians. One of the slogans of the DK was "Wreck the Triple Alliance of the British, Brahmin, and Bania."

[T]he slogan tried to involve in a subtle manner both the Congress (which in Tamilnad was dominated by Brahmins despite the strident anti-Brahmin campaigns of Naicker) and the north (symbolised by the Bania because Mahatma Gandhi was a Bania by caste) and suggested a conspiracy by the British with north Indian Aryans (whose agents the Tamil Brahmins and the Bania Ghandi were supposed to be) to keep the Dravidian people in subjugation.⁵⁹

Annadurai also argued that by celebrating Independence Day, they could disprove Congress accusations that they were lackeys of British colonialism.⁶⁰ He further pointed out that in "independent India", the energies of the DK could now be directed mainly to rousing the masses against the north Indian Aryan exploitation and he was confident that they had the will and capacity to succeed.⁶¹

The *Dravidanadu*, *New Justice*, *Mandram*, and Anbazhagan's *Puthuvaazhu* endorsed Annadurai's interpretation. However, with the DK, those who supported Annadurai's viewpoint did not constitute a majority.⁶² Also, Annadurai's persuasive arguments failed to change Periyar's decision to boycott Independence Day celebrations. This, however, did not deter Annadurai from defying Periyar's directive and he hoisted the Indian national flag atop his residence in Kanchipuram on Independence Day. This act clearly demonstrated Annadurai's determination to act on the basis of his own political convictions on fundamental issues.

⁵⁷ *Hindu*, February 11, 1946.

⁵⁸ Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁹ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Pandiyan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶¹ Parthasarathy, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶² Maraimalaiyaan, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

"Intra-Party Democracy"

The issue of the lack of "intra-party democracy" also created dissensions within the party. Although the party had an elaborate organizational set-up, the various organizational units including the party's general council and the executive committee, which, in theory, were the most important decision making units of the party, did not have any real power. Most of the important decisions were taken unilaterally by Periyar himself. The "progressive" section of the party led by Annadurai opposed Periyar's authoritarianism in decision-making within the party and argued strongly for "intra-party democracy" but Periyar did not make any concessions at all.

Attitude Towards Electoral Participation

In Periyar's conception, the DK was not strictly a political party but a social and political movement whose basic objective was to bring about fundamental changes in the social and political attitudes and practices of the people rather than the capturing of political power through participation in elections. According to Mohan Ram,

The stubborn patriarch was keeping the Kazhagam off parliamentary politics to prevent its degeneration into a power-seeking caucus like the Congress with all the temptations any party system offers.⁶³

But Annadurai and the "progressive" wing of the party disagreed. They argued that if the party did not participate in elections, which were to be held on the basis of adult franchise, its political support would be eroded by other election-oriented parties which appealed to the masses along the same lines as the DK and succeeded in securing representation in the legislature. Such parties would then become the real representatives of Dravidian interests and the DK would increasingly become politically irrelevant. On the positive side, they also pointed to the possibility of fulfilling their objectives through capturing constitutional power. As on other issues, Periyar did not yield and refused to lift the "keep off elections" signs.

In the above paragraphs, some important issues on which there were differing viewpoints between Periyar and Annadurai and their respective followers have been examined. However, none of the above issues really threatened party unity and solidarity to a significant extent. The differences were temporarily patched up and surface unity was achieved. However, political differences between the two groups came to the forefront again very soon. In the party conference of 1948, Annadurai and his supporters staged a walkout in protest against Periyar's authoritarianism. Also, sensing Periyar's opposition to his political convictions, Annadurai deliberately kept off the Tuticorin conference of the party. At this time, there were speculations that Annadurai and his supporters might resign from the party. But the speculations were temporarily proved wrong when Periyar appointed

⁶³ Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

Annadurai president of a special party conference at Erode in 1948. On the surface, it therefore seemed that Periyar-Annadurai differences had been resolved and that elite consensus had been achieved at Erode. There was a new mood of optimism within the party. But this was short-lived and within a year, there was a split in the party. Periyar's second marriage to Maniyammai was the main cause for this dramatic development.

Periyar issued two lengthy press statements under the title "Explanation" which appeared in the 19th and 28th June, 1949 editions of the *Viduthalai*.⁶⁴ In his "explanation", he made it absolutely clear that he did not have any confidence in his political lieutenants to lead the party after his exit from the political scene; he also announced the formation of a "trust" headed by a widow, Maniyammai, ("who has a genuine concern for my personal and the party's interests")⁶⁵ and four or five members for the management of his personal and the party's properties. By this act, Maniyammai became the political "heir" to Periyar. This came as a shock to many party members and sympathisers.

Periyar's "explanation" and the formation of a "trust" headed by Maniyammai do not logically follow from his earlier announcement at the Erode conference that he was handing over the "keys", that is, the leadership, to Annadurai. This sudden political turnabout by Periyar came as a surprise to everyone from the top leaders to the lower echelons in the party hierarchy. Annadurai and Sampath (Periyar's nephew) certainly had greater political acumen and enjoyed greater popularity both within and outside the party than Maniyammai. Also, at this time, there was no evidence to indicate that Annadurai and/or Sampath were attempting to oust Periyar from the leadership of the party. Although their political viewpoints differed from Periyar on certain issues, they still accepted Periyar's leadership and many expected them to succeed Periyar. Under such circumstances, why were Annadurai and Sampath discarded in favour of Maniyammai? What were the real motivations behind these moves of Periyar? These were the unanswered questions of the day. There were a great deal of speculations within the party.

Before the other leaders of the party could formally react to these developments, another surprising news came into the open. A Madras daily newspaper reported that Periyar was about to get married to Maniyammai and that both had visited the Registrar of Marriages office on June 18, 1949.⁶⁶ The report came as a real shock to party leaders and members. The central executive committee of the party and other members issued statements condemning the marriage and requested Periyar to give up the idea but Periyar's response was firmly negative.

⁶⁴ For the full text, see Parthasarathy, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ M. Thamizhchelvan, *Aringar Anna* (Scholar Anna) (Madras: Asokhan Pathippagam, 1967), p. 106.

In fact, it can be argued that Periyar was only practising what he preached (widow re-marriage) and that therefore he should have been supported: but the reaction was an almost unanimous condemnation of the marriage. Why did the party leaders and members object vehemently to the marriage? Their basic argument was that it was a *poruntha thirumanam* or "unequal marriage" (in terms of age). Periyar and Maniyammai were 72 and 26 years old respectively. The wide disparity in their ages meant that it was "a highly unequal union". As a social reformer, Periyar had been campaigning against the widely prevalent practice of old men marrying young women, proudly pointing to his own widower's life since the death of his wife, Nagammai. This was also one of the principal creeds of the Self-Respectors. Some supporters of Periyar's marriage argued that, as a social reformer, he was not deviating from his principles because he objected to *forced* "unequal marriages" only, that is, generally without the bride's consent. There was some element of truth in this argument. However, the objectors argued that the "unequal marriage" of the party leader himself would affect the party's image adversely.

The second argument centered around the fact that Periyar's re-marriage was not in keeping with the Dravidian tradition of "reform marriages"⁶⁷ which

were of course not lawful as they conformed neither to the Hindi religious custom requiring the presence of the priest and the worship of the sacred fire, nor to the secular practice of registration under the Civil Marriages Act. The zealous followers of the Periyar did not care for this. But they were shocked, and, indeed, deeply offended to learn that Periyar's wedding was registered under the Civil Marriages Act as Periyar wanted his wife and offspring to be his legal heirs.⁶⁸

The third argument centered around Periyar's designation of Maniyammai as his "political heir". The objectors questioned Periyar's right to appoint a successor to lead the party after his exit and pointed out that the party's leadership had to be elected by the members of the party.⁶⁹ This was related to the criticism of Periyar's authoritarianism and the lack of intra-party democracy.

Despite the barrage of protests, Periyar did not change his decision and the wedding took place on 9th July 1949. This threw the entire party machinery into confusion and for the next few months, party activity in terms of propagating party objectives came to a virtual standstill. During these months, Annadurai demonstrated remarkable skills of leadership and

⁶⁷ "The 'reform' marriage rites of the DK gained wide acceptance among the non-Brahmins of Tamilnad. Dispensing with the priest and Hindu ritual, the couple to be married was seated and someone was selected from those attending, without consideration of caste, to preside over the function. To seal the ties of marriage, he requested the couple to exchange garlands and, in some cases, the man tied a *tali* (golden chain or yellow thread) to the bride." Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Balasundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 170. After the DMK came into power in 1967, it passed a bill which made "reform marriages" legally valid.

⁶⁹ Parthasarathy, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

organized support for a new party, the DMK, which was inaugurated on September 17, 1949.⁷⁰ Most of the members of the DK resigned and joined the new party led by Annadurai, and the founding of the DMK represented the beginning of a new chapter in the politics of Tamil Nadu.

⁷⁰ The party later adopted the "Rising Sun" as its symbol.