

Book Review

The Dravida Movement

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"History of DMK - 1916-1962" by T M Parthasarathy, Madras, 1963. Written in Tamil. Published by Pari Nilayam, 59 Broadway, Madras-1; pp 640, price Rs 4.

In recent years sociologists and social anthropologists have started conducting enquiries into Indian political institutions. Many of these sociological studies, based on intensive fieldwork experience in specific areas in India, focus attention on the importance of social factors in the political processes of the country. These studies show, in particular, the role of caste affiliations in the politics of the country. However, there is no single comprehensive sociological work on the contemporary history of India. This is a great lacuna in our studies on modern India which needs to be urgently filled.

No study on contemporary Indian problems will be complete without any reference to the various socio-political movements which arose in the early years of this century as a protest against the domination of certain sections of population in different parts of India. The Dravida Kazagam (DK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam (DMK) movement in Tamilnad are one such development in peninsular India.

Genesis of D M K

Today the DK and DMK play an important part in the social and political life of the people of Tamilnad. In recent years these two organisations have come to attract nation-wide attention as a result of their militant and separatist activities. To understand the present position of the DK and DMK movement in the country it is very necessary to trace its history. There are not very many authentic historical accounts on the DK and DMK movements in Tamilnad. The few that are available do not give a complete picture of the movement. Therefore, T M Parthasarathy's comprehensive book is very welcome.

The DK and DMK movement has its genesis in the Brahman—non-Brahman conflict. The Brahman—non-Brahman conflict in Tamilnad has been associated with three organisations, first the Justice Party, then the DK and now the DMK. It should be kept in mind that although the first two organisations were specifically created

to assert the rights of non-Brahmans against the dominant position of the Brahmans, the DMK has not been explicitly anti-Brahmanical in its aims and programmes. Stated briefly then the history of the movement may be outlined in three phases largely corresponding to the development of the three organisations.

Justice Party

The call for the promotion of the interests of 'Dravidians' was given first by the *Thenindeya Nala Urumai Sangam* (South Indian Welfare Society or Party) which was founded in 1916. The move for establishing such a society was initiated by Sir P Thyagarayar. At the time of its establishment the Society consisted of such eminent non-Brahman leaders as Dr T M Nair, Dr C Natesa Mudaliar, Raja of Panagal and Sir A Ramasami Mudaliar. The Society started running three daily newspapers, one in English called *Justice*, another in Tamil called *Dravidan* and the third one in Telegu called *Andera Prakashani*. This Society was later on popularly called the 'Justice Party' after the title of its English newspaper. The Justice Party contested the 'election' in 1920 and formed the first-ever Indian 'cabinet' in Madras in 1921. The Justice Party had put up candidates again during the 1923 election and it formed the second cabinet in the following year. But in the elections held in 1926 the Justice Party could not secure a majority of seats in the State Legislature and lost the control of the State to the Swarajya Party. The Justice Party never completely recovered from the defeat of 1926, though it lingered on as a party till 1936. The general elections in 1936 gave the last blow to the Justice Party, for no member belonging to the party was elected to the State Legislature. The image of the Justice Party as the organisation of rich landlords and Western-educated upper-caste non-Brahman intellectuals of Tamilnad and Telegu country contributed, to a certain extent, to its downfall.

The Justice Party became a defunct organisation by 1940. However, the

call for the promotion of the interests of 'Dravidians' did not end with the Justice Party, and that responsibility was taken over by the Dravida Kazagam. The DK, founded in 1942 by E V Ramasami Naicker (Who is popularly known as *Periyar* or 'the Elder') aimed at the organisation of 'Dravidians' towards the goal of 'self respect' (*suyamariyathai*). The establishment of the DK in itself should be considered as the culmination of the *suyamariyathai* movement which was set in motion right from the heyday of the Justice Party. *Periyar*, the founder-leader of the DK, advocated that the non-Brahmans, i.e., persons other than the Brahmins, in Tamilnad should oppose anybody calling them non-Brahmins but should consider themselves as belonging to the 'Dravidian race'. *Periyar* also propagated the positive identity of non-Brahmins as members of a 'Dravidian nation' entitled to sovereign independence from the Indian union. This ideology found expression in slogans such as 'thamezar nadu thamezarukke' (Tamilnad belongs to only Tamilians) and 'Dravida nadu Dravidarukke' (the land of the Dravidians belongs only to Dravidians). The hold of E V Ramasami Naicker on the movement did not last long. His influence was considerably curtailed by the establishment of the DMK.

D K and D M K : The Differences

The DMK was formed in 1949 by some of the ambitious followers of *Periyar* under the leadership of C N Annadurai (who is popularly known as *Aringar Anna* or Learned Elder Brother), when *Periyar*—at that time a man of 72—married a girl of 28 years. Though the followers of *Anna* had differences with *Periyar* on the marriage question, the differences were more deep-rooted. The DMK as an organisation differed from DK in its principles and objectives. In the first place, DK under the control of a single person, the *Periyar*, was not a well-knit organisation. The DMK, on the other hand, from its inception believed in facing the problems it confronted as a single organisation. In the second place, *Periyar* at no time gave any

serious thought to the question of making DK a political party interested in capturing a place for itself in the political institutions of the country. The DMK, on the other hand, has been taking an active part in the political field and it has been putting up candidates for municipal, State and parliamentary elections.

Anti-North Orientation

The DK and DMK movement, started initially as a protest against the domination of the Brahmans in Tamilnad, was given a new dimension after India's Independence when the attack was directed against the alleged domination of North India. It found expression in the slogan 'therku thaikerathu, vadaku valarkerathu', i.e., the South is receding and the North is progressing. Opposition to 'Aryan' domination is the common reason for the movement's antipathy to the Brahmans and the North. In order to escape the alleged domination of the North, the DMK started the agitation for an independent 'Dravida nadu' or 'Dravidasthan'. It seems, from the book under review, that though the DMK has because of legal and constitutional compulsions given up recently its demand for an independent 'Dravida nadu', it has not lost faith in the ideal. Along with the movement against the Brahmans and the North, a host of other activities were initiated, primarily directed against the use of Hindi language in schools and colleges in Tamilnad and the use of Sanskrit in temple worship and against idol worship. No one studying the social processes in Tamilnad today can afford to neglect these forces released by the DK and DMK movement in the last 30 to 40 years.

In tracing the history of DK and DMK movement in Tamilnad I found T M Parthasarathy's book a useful guide. Here I must add that many of the socio-political developments of contemporary India such as the DK and DMK movement are not well-documented in English. However, a considerable volume of literature is available in regional languages. The book under review, written in Tamil, is in itself a good example as far as the DMK movement in Tamilnad is concerned. It Rev Father Xavier S Thani Nayagam in his recent paper* demonstrates the value of literature in

* Xavier S Thani Nayagam "Regional Nationalism in Twentieth Century Tamil Literature", *Tamil Culture*, Vol X, No 1, Jan-Mar 1963, pp 1-23,

a regional language for studies on regionalism and nationalism in contemporary India. The book under review contains a wealth of material on the social history of Tamilnad which could be utilised by social historians and sociologists. There are, however, a few limitations which should not be overlooked. It is written by an active member of the DMK party and hence, contains, rather inescapably, considerable propaganda material. In a number

of places Parthasarathy reproduces verbatim the speeches of the party leaders without showing their relevance in tracing the development of the movement. However, being a party man is not always a limitation. Parthasarathy, being a party man of very long standing, has been able to provide in his book certain insights into the development and working of the DMK party which cannot easily be gained by outsiders.



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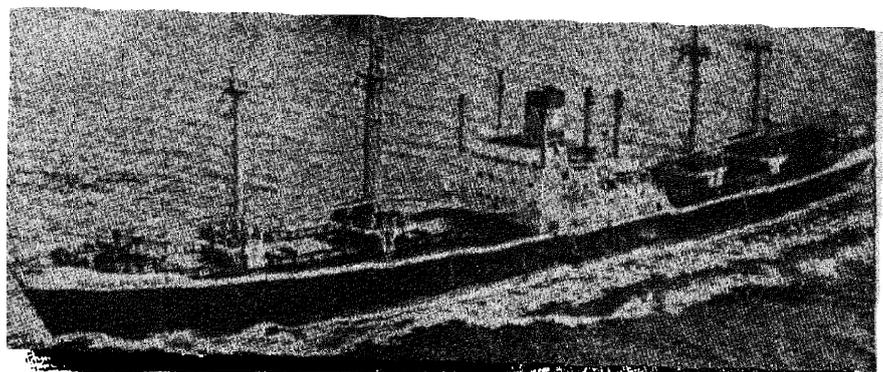
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