

DALIT ACTIVISTS AND PROMINENT LEADERS OF TAMILNADU

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Abstract

19th century many leaders who came forward to construct a dalit consciousness. M.C. Rajah, Srinivasan, M.Y. Murugesan, Madurai Pillai, Ramasamy Mudaliar, L.K.Gurusamy, M.K.Marippa, N.Shivaraj,etc many dalit leaders support and service to dalits upliftment. Srinivasan was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council as a representative of the depressed classes in 1923. The British government bestowed the honour of Dewan Bahadur of him, for his services to the nation and community. Pandit palaniswamy started a school in 1917 for them. He started a hostel for the students of the depressed classes. He started Dravidian youth society to inculcate a new social awareness among the Untouchables. He worked in the company of M.C Rajah in the socio political field.M.C. Rajah served as secretary of the state Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1916. A conference of the All India

Depressed Castes Association established in 1928 was held under his presidency. In 1920 he was nominated as member of the Madras legislative council. Then he was nominated as a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly in the year 1927. He was member till 1937.

Key words: Subedar, Dalit, Arumuga Navalar, Tamizhan

Introduction

The germination of dalit consciousness in Tamilnadu had an intimate context of the emergence of Arumuga Navalar's upper caste saivism, the emergence of Brahmanic identity through various samajams at the all India level, Caldwell's tamil identity, vallalar samarasa sanmargam in the latter half of the 19th century. Many leaders who came forward to construct a dalit consciousness. M.C. Rajah, Srinivasan, M.Y. Murugesan, Madurai Pillai, Ramasamy Mudaliar, L.K.Gurusamy, M.K.Marippa, N.Shivaraj, etc many dalit leaders support and service to dalits upliftment.

M.Y.Murugesan

The early dalit Buddhist followers of first decade of 20th century. He was born in 1856 at Kolar Gold Field. His father Mount Yagambara served in the British Army and rose to the rank of Subedar Major. He passed his intermediate from Christian College, Madras. After that he got an ordinary job as an employee in Marikuppam gold mines but he promoted as assistant pay roll officer. He married Krishnammal. His family consisted of three sons and four daughters. He met his end on 27 June 1921 at the age of 65. He embraced Buddhism in 1902. He sought membership of the South Indian Sakya Buddhist association established in 1900 by Pandit C. Iyothee Thass. He said started the branches of the said association. To increase spread of education among the untouchables and Buddhists, he started a primary school named south India Buddhist School at Marikuppam in the year 1932. It exists even now and imparts education up to the seventh class.

Madurai Pillai (1858-1913)

Madurai Pillai name also figures in the list of leading workers. He was born at a time when the British had established their empire in India after the Mutiny of 1857. He was born at Madras in 1858. He was son of Maduari Pillai. He got his early education in SPG School,

Vepey in Madras, St. Paul's High School, Rangoon adulator at Christian Collage, Madras. Later he worked as steel company at Rangoon. He was also an Honorary Magistrate for a period of 25 years. He was a silent workers and inspired many dalit youths. He was also a great philanthropist and a great seeker of knowledge. Many poets sang his praise in their poems. These poems are compiled in a book form called Madurai Pillai Prabandam. He breathed his last in 1913 at the age of 55.

R. Srinivasan (1859-1945)

In south India, Srinivasan was a beacon light who not only organised and inspired the depressed masses but himself influenced by Gandhiji created the spirit of nationalism among the Untouchables of those days. He was born on 7 July 1859 at village Kozhiyalam village in Madharanthagam Taluk, Chengalput district in Tamilnadu. His father Rettaimalai Srinivasan was a poor farmer. He belonged to the Adi Dravidar community. In order to organize them, formed Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in the year 1891. He organized the first conference of the untouchables on 23 December, 1893 and declared his "open war" on untouchables. He started one magazine named Paraiyan in 1893. He convened the next conference of the untouchables on 7 October, 1895 at Victoria Hall Madras. R.Srinivasan returned to India in 1920. He was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council as a representative of the depressed classes in 1923. The British government bestowed the honour of Dewan Bahadur of him, for his services to the nation and community. He married Ranganyakkimma in 1887. He died in September, 1945 at the ripe age of 86.

Pandit Palaniswami (1870-1941)

Pandit Palaniswamy was born in 1870 at Madras in a pariah family. His father was Thiru Madurai Pillai. Palaniswamy was well versed in Vedas and knew astrology. His teacher ShriGangadhara Navalar, he worked with him till 1900 in Tiruppani-k-kuttam, a religious organization. Thereafter he constructed a temple named, Balasubramanian Swamy temple in Madras. For spread of education among the depressed classes, he started a school in 1917 for them. He started a hostel for the students of the depressed classes. He started Dravidian youth society to inculcate a new social awareness among the Untouchables. He worked in the company of M.C Rajah in the socio political field.

I.N.Iyakannu (1875-1955)

Ichiputtur Iyakannu was born on 8 October 1875 at Ichpattur, Arakkonam Taluka, North Arcot districts. He was an Adi-Dravida. His father Ichiputtur Narayana Swamy was a small farmer. He served as a Tamil teachers in a Buddhist school at Marikuppam from 1907 to 1942. I.N.Iyakannu Pulavar was a social worker too the core of his heart. His improved the spread of education among the untouchables he with the help of others founded the Buddhist primary school at Marikkuppam. Iyakkannu edited a weekly newspaper Tamizhan 1932 to 1935. He was renowned author and poet. He wrote many books such as Mana Bhakti Rasa Kirthanaigai(1912), Thiru Pasurakothu and Mysore State History. He married Ammai Mammal in 1920 and had one daughter and one son. His son I. Loganathan became the president of the Buddhist Society of India.

A.Ramaswamy Mudaliar

Mudaliar is famous and known for Dalit cause. A leader of Justice party, contemporary and colleague of Naicker, A.R. Mudaliar throughout his life fought against caste system and untouchability. In 1939 he was elected president of the south Indian liberal federation (formerly known as Justice party) and proposed in Salem conference to change its name to D.M.K so that shudras, Untouchables and non-Brahman movement may be further strengthened to check up the Brahmanical supremacy. Mudaliar was one of the founders of non-Brahman movement in India.

M.C.Rajah (1883-1947)

In the dalit history, rajah name is written in golden letters. He was contemporary of Dr.Ambedkar and a first rank dalit leader from south India. He was born in Thomas mount, Madras. His father Shri China Thambi Pillai, worked as manager of the Lawrence asylum press, Madras. M.C. Rajah received education at Wesley mission High school, Royapettah and Christian college, madras. He came of the pariah caste. He began his career as a teacher in 1906. In 1917 he got nomination to the elementary education committee and in 1924 to the madras university senate. He got appointment as a member of the secondary education reorganisation committee and the school at Nugambakkam in 1936. He actively participated

in organisation and uplifting the depressed classes. He served as secretary of the state Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1916. A conference of the All India Depressed Castes Association established in 1928 was held under his presidenship. In 1920 he was nominated as member of the Madras legislative council. Then he was nominated as a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly in the year 1927. He was member till 1937. All the prominent leaders including Rajah condemned the Cripps proposal as they were opposed to the interests of the scheduled castes. He visited Srilanka in 1928 and England in 1929. He served as a member of several committee appointed by the Government. He was a member of the advisory committee to the Simon Commission. He was presented with the title of Rao Bahadur by the Government of India, in the year 1922 in recognition to his services to the society. He expired in 1947 at the age of 64.

L.K.Gurusamy

He was born in the same year 1885 when Indian National Congress took birth. His place of birth is Madras and his father Kottappa Guruswamy was also a renowned social worker. He was determined to bring out the untouchables from their backwardness. He felt that spread of education could be the best means to achieve the purpose. Hence he established two night schools in Mylapur area of madras in the year 1921. He started Mylapur, Periamet and other places. He was elected member of madras legislature assembly around 1920 to 1930. He was a member of the madras university senate in 1929.

G.Appaduraiyar (1890-1961)

Gaberiel Appaduraiyar was born on 15 May, 1890 at Salem in Tamil Nadu. His father Shri Gebriel belong to adi-dravida caste and later was converted to Christianity. Though Appaduraiyar was born as a Christian, he converted to Buddhism in the year 1911. He was a Tamil Pandit. He served as a high school teacher in Tamilnadu at kolar gold fields. He presided over the first Buddhist conference held at Madras in 1917. He also presided over the fourth Buddhists conference held at Madras in 1945. He brought out Tamil weekly Tamizhan in 1928. The writing s and speeches of Pandit Appaduraiyar are said to have influenced E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker. He wrote a book on Buddhism in Tamil known as Buddhar arularam in the year 1950.

N. Shivaraj (1892-1964)

One of the dalit leaders of the first generation of the renaissance age, N. Shivaraj was born on 29 September, 1892 at Cudappa(AP). His father Namoshivaya served as an accounts officer. His original native place was a village named Pongu Malli near Madras. N. Shivaraj completed his matriculation in 1907. He did his B.A. in 1915 from Presidency College, Madras and B.L. in the 1915 from Madras University. After he started his legal practise at Madras high court. He also served as a professor of law in Government Law College, Madras for 13 years. N. Shivaraj started his career in politics as member of the Justice Party funded by Periyar Ramasamy Naicker. He wanted to liberate his brethren from the thralldom of untouchability and casteism. He also felt that Justice Party was of no use to the Dalits. Therefore he parted ways with Justice Party in 1928 and joined the Dalit uplift movement under the leadership of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar. In March 1946 the conference of the Scheduled Castes Federation was held at Agra under his presidency. The Scheduled Caste Federation failed to achieve any success in the general elections held in 1946. Ambedkar pointed towards the Poona Pact as the cause of failure. He wanted to secure political rights to the Scheduled Castes as a separate group. As such he launched a nationwide satyagraha in 1946 for political rights. He pointed that the benefits of the plans and policies of the government could not reach the people. His father an Adi Dravidar had converted to Buddhism. So, N. Shivaraj was a born Buddhist. He used to advise his brethren to embrace Buddhism.

M.K. Marippa (1907-1989)

Mottayan Mariappa was born in 1907 at village Pappireddipatty, in Harur Taluk, Dharmapuri district in Tamilnadu on Adi-Dravida community. He joined politics at the age of 18. He became a member of Congress and began serving this community as well as the nation. He joined Adi Dravidar Movement prevalent in the erstwhile Madras State. He became president of Dharmapuri District Adi-Dravida Welfare Association. In the first general elections

held in 1952 he contested on SCF ticket for the madras legislative assembly from Harur constituency. He became the trustee of the Teerthgiri temple, Theerthamalai. Where at one time he had forced his entry for claiming equality and religious freedom.

Jenaraju

Jenaraju was born on 5 April 1915 at Perambur, Madras. His father Nayanapallayam was a contractor at kolar gold fields in Karnataka. His mother Gouramma was primary school teacher at Buddha vihar, Prembur. He completed his matriculation in 1930 from Egmore high school, Madras. He served as Chief Examiner from 1931-74 in the famous Buckingham Carnatic mills Ltd., Perambur. Jenaraju established young men's Buddhist association at madras in 1946 and tried to bring together young Buddhist under one banner. He advised them to maintain highmoral and cultural standards. He joined madras labour union in 1938 and was a member of the executive body of the trade union from 1938-43.

Conclusion

His father Rettaimalai Srinivasan was a poor farmer. He belonged to the Adi dravidar community. In order to organized them, e formed Adi-dravida Mahajana Sabha in the year 1891. He organised the first conference of the untouchables on 23 December, 1893 and declared his "open war" on untouchables. He actively participated in organisation and uplifting the depressed classes. He served as secretary of the state Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1916. A conference of the All India Depressed Castes Association established in 1928 was held under his presidency. Many leaders who came forward to construct a dalit consciousness.

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