

EVR and Radical Hindi Agitation in Tamilnadu

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Introduction

This study is dedicated to the great personality Periyar E.V. Ramasami (E.V.R.) (1879-1973) who expressed his ideas on rationalism, self-respect, women's rights and eradication of social evils and thus contributed to socio-political development in Tamil Nadu. The outstanding merit of Erode Venkata Naicker Ramasami (Periyar E.V.R.) was his frugality and simplicity. His ambitions were high, but his desires were modest. He kept his desires to a minimum. He was freed from any addiction. He was a crusader against social inequality and injustice in Tamil Nadu. The issue that gave rise to the agitation of the first Dravidian movement was the introduction of Hindi as a compulsory subject in certain schools. Kudi Arasu, Revolta and Justice opposed Hindi as a Northern Aryan language. This opposition to Sanskrit Aryan culture was fundamentally unsuited to non-Brahmin Dravidian culture. Moreover, the language issue provided a convenient political rallying point after the 1936 electoral debacle.

First Attempt to Introduce Hindi

Gandhi seriously embarked on the experiment of spreading Hindi in South India. He founded the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha in Madras in 1918 to promote Hindi in the four language areas of the Madras Presidency. Enthusiastic young boys and girls came to join the Sabha to study the Hindi language. Year by year the number of students joining the Sabha increased. But trouble began as soon as the study of Hindi was made compulsory in high schools in the Madras Presidency. The Congress party participated in the general elections held in 1937. In the Madras Presidency, the Congress won 159 seats and formed the government. C. Rajagopalachari, respectfully called Rajaji, became the leader of the Congress Legislature Party and assumed the office of Prime Minister (Prime Minister) on 14 July 1937.¹ Rajaji was of the opinion that Hindi could be made a compulsory subject in schools. On 10 August 1937,

attending a meeting held at the Ramakrishna Student Home, Madras, Rajaji announced that the study of Hindi would be made compulsory in schools. He also announced the teaching of Hindi in 125 high schools in the budget session of the Assembly for 1938-1939. On 21 April 1938, the Government of Madras issued an order that from the academic year 1938-1939, Hindi was to be taught as a compulsory subject in the first three classes of secondary schools. Periyar became a member of the Madras Provincial Anti-Hindi League. On July 28, Rajaji was welcomed with black flags and volunteers shouted 'Rajaji Go Back' in Erode, Periyar's home town. On December 5, Periyar was charged under the I.P.C. 117 and Section 7(1) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act for his speech at the Tamil Nadu Women's Conference held at Madras. He was sentenced to one and a half years in prison. Punitive measures were taken against Periyar magazines. His brother E.V. Krishnaswamy was also arrested. In the first anti-Hindi agitation, nearly 1271 persons were arrested. Rajaji resigned as Prime Minister on 30 October 1939. Soon after Rajaji's resignation, Periyar suspended the anti-Hindi agitation. Subsequently, the government released all the persons who were arrested in connection with the anti-Hindi agitation.²

On 17 November, the Madras Mail, in an editorial entitled "Compulsion Should Go", asked the Governor to abolish the Congress government's policy on Hindi.³ Accordingly, the Madras Government issued an order on 21 February 1940 which abolished the compulsory study of Hindi in schools. The next day, Periyar issued a statement welcoming the government's decision and congratulating the Tamils for the achievement.⁴

The Language Policy of D.K

After the inauguration of the Dravidian Federation or DravidaKazhagam (D.K.) in 1944, E.V. R. claimed that there was little difference between the new organization and the Justice Party, but none of the prominent justices were ready to accept his views or cooperate with him. , build a new organization. Even his close friends like Soundarapandian and SamiappaMudaliar could not accept his dictatorial attitude and thus distanced themselves from him after the Salem Conference. Some eloquent young men like K.M.Balasubramaniam, Viswanathan and others left politics for good while others like P.Balasubramaniam, T.A.V. Nathan, Tirumalaiswami and Salem Rathinaswami rallied around P.T.Rajan who tried to revive the Justice Party but the efforts met with failure. The only eloquent youth who stood by E.V.R. and strengthened his hand, was C.N. Annadurai. Along with him, a group of enthusiastic young men were determined to build a new party with the main political objective of a separate country for the Dravidians. In addition to this goal, at least in E.V.R.'s view, the party was to be an organization of social reform in order to usher in an egalitarian Dravidian society.⁵

Second Attempt to Introduce Hindi, 1948

Elections to the Provincial Legislative Assemblies were held between January and April 1946. In the Madras Legislative Assembly, the Congress Party won 163 seats out of a total of 215. Rajaji again tried to become the Prime Minister of Madras with the help of Gandhi and other leaders. However, the bitter memory of Rajaji's rule still remained in the minds of the people and members of the Congress Legislature Party rejected the recommendation of the Congress High Command in favor of Rajaji by 148 votes to 38.⁶ T. Prakasam was elected T. leader of the Congress Legislature Party and assumed the office of Prime Minister on 30 April 1946. However, due to internal party disputes, T. Prakasam had to resign within a year. He was succeeded by O.P.Ramasamy Reddy as Prime Minister on 23 March 1947 and T.Avinashilingam Chettiar joined his ministry as Education Minister. The Congress government wanted to continue the experiment of making the study of Hindi compulsory in schools for the second time. Accordingly, the government passed an order on

20 June 1948. But this time the government was smart enough to pass such an order, making the study of Hindi compulsory only in Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada areas and optional in Tamil Nadu. Congress leaders and national newspapers in Tamil Nadu raised hue and cry over it. They wanted Hindi to be made compulsory in Tamil Nadu schools as well. After that the study of Hindi was made compulsory even in Tamil Nadu.⁷

Immediately E.V.R. and Annadurai started a campaign against Hindi. A specially convened Anti-Hindu Conference was held in St. Mary's Hall, Madras on July 17, 1948. E.V.R., Annadurai, Maraimalai Adigal, Thiru Congress Leader. V. Kalyanasundaram, Tamil poet, Bharathidasan, M.P. Sivagnanam, leader of Tamil ArasuKazhagam and others addressed the conference and emphasized the need to start agitations against the imposition of Hindi. A student anti-Hindi conference was held in Madras on 1 August 1948 under the presidentship of C. Elakkuvar. The DravidarKazhagam Executive Committee, which met in Madras on 2 August 1948, condemned the introduction of Hindi, whether as a compulsory or optional subject, and decided to patrol and black-flag schools where Hindi was made compulsory. Furthermore, the executive committee of D.K. decided to appoint Annadurai as the first dictator of demonstration activities.⁸

On hearing this news, Prime Minister O.P. Ramasamy Reddy expressed his desire to hold a dialogue with E.V.R. over this problem. E.V.R. also readily agreed to this proposal and met the Prime Minister at his residence on August 8, 1948. As the two had been friends for many years and had worked together in the Congress Party, the Prime Minister welcomed E.V.R. kindly. But the prime minister could not change his position. Then E.V.R. he told the prime minister that he had no option but to start an agitation. So the conversation between the two leaders was cordial and friendly, but it did nothing to resolve the issue. As planned earlier, the second anti-Hindi agitation was launched on 10 August 1948. On that day, Annadurai led a demonstration outside the Muthialpet High School in Madras. C.T.T. Arasu, N.V. Natarajan, N. Subramanian and many others participated in the demonstration which was repeated in the afternoon as well. This time, however, the government did not relent in arresting the protesters, which may have been due to the previous actions of the E.V.R. with Prime Minister O.P. Ramasamy Reddy. The demonstration was turned into a demonstration that continued for twenty-two days. The Madras Provincial Teachers' Conference held in Madras in August 1948 condemned the imposition of Hindi. They were of the opinion that Hindi would wipe out the Tamil language and by a resolution demanded the abolition of Hindi from schools.⁹

The then Governor General of India Rajaji was scheduled to visit Madras at this time. The DravidarKazhagam Executive Committee met at the residence of E.V.R. On August 22, 1948, decide to hoist the Rajaji black flags. As the discussions took place inside the house, under the chairmanship of E.V.R., the police suddenly entered the house and arrested E.V.R., Annadurai, K.K. Neelamegam, C.T.T. Arasu, E.V.K. Sampath, K.A. Mathialagan, N.V. Natarajan and A.P. Janarthanam. However, when Rajaji visited Madras the next day, he was greeted everywhere by black flags and the police had to fire teargas shells and lathis to disperse the crowd. Appadurai, a renowned writer, and his wife Alamelu, Appadurai, were among the many black shirt volunteers who were injured due to arbitrary police beatings.¹⁰

Despite the repressive measures unleashed by the Congress government, D.K. volunteers and Tamil enthusiasts continued two types of agitations namely black flag showing and demonstration. Black flags were shown to Madras Governor Bhavanagar Maharaja in Madras, Prime Minister O.P. Ramasamy Reddy when he visited Kanchipuram, Education Minister Avinashilingam Chettiar in Dharmapuri and Kaverippakkam, Minister Madhava Menon in Alandur and Minister Chandragalmouli in Dinduli on various days.¹¹

E.V.R., on hearing of the initiation of police action by the Government of India at Hyderabad on September 14, 1948, suspended the agitations with the good intention of not causing any trouble to the Madras Government at that time. He did, however, organize a one-day token demonstration, on 15 September 1948, across the province. Similar parades and demonstrations in schools by volunteers from D.K. were organized in Madurai, Tiruchi, Coimbatore, Erode, Salem, Kanchipuram and other capitals of Madras province.¹²

A Provincial Conference of D.K. was held at Erode under the leadership of E.V.R. The Erode Conference was presided over by Annadurai. Thiru. V.Kalyanasundaram and K.V.Alagirisamy gave their inspirational speeches and urged people to join the fight against Hindi. It was decided at the conference that the suspended agitations should be resumed as the Government of India's police action in Hyderabad had come to a successful conclusion. Accordingly, Alamelu Appadurai led a demonstration in front of the Muthialpet High School in Madras on 2 November 1948. Kalaiselvan, Salaikafir, O.C.Pandiyan and C.S.Dravidamani participated in the demonstration. All the protesters were arrested and taken 125 km from Madras city and released from there.¹³

As the agitation gained momentum, the government began to adopt repressive measures. The Madras Government promulgated Section 144 in all major cities prohibiting public gatherings in connection with agitations. D.K. decided to disobey the ban by holding meetings. At Kumbakonam, E.V.R. was arrested from V. Chinnathambi's house at midnight on 18 December 1948 for violating prohibition. The next day, N. V. Natarajan, K. K. Neelamegam and Maniammaiar, followed by a large number of volunteers, set out for the procession restraining order. The police immediately resorted to lathi charge in which N.V.Natarajan was seriously injured. N.V.Natarajan and Maniammai were arrested and later sentenced to two months rigorous imprisonment. Many others were also arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Condemning police violence in Kumbakonam, supporters of D.K. they celebrated Anti-Suppression Day on January 1, 1949 throughout the province. After that, in many places of the province and in large numbers, D.K. organized processions and public meetings, disobeying the ban the men were arrested. N.Natarajan, N.Rajavel and five others were arrested in Panruti and sentenced to six months in prison.¹⁴

Demonstrations in schools also intensified. Kanchi Manimoliar, T.M.Parthasarathy, C.T.T.Arasu, K.Govindasamy, N.Sivarathinam and others participated in a demonstration outside Muthialpet High School, Madras on 1 January 1949. A team of twelve women led by Sathiaivanimuthu was arrested on the next day at the demonstration. The demonstration continued for more than 100 days and ended only when K. Kamaraj, president of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, made several observations on the language issue. He regretted that "The Madras Department did not take public opinion into account while introducing important schemes. Without considering the past imprisonment of 1800 persons when Hindi was made a compulsory subject in schools, the Education Minister issued a statement, creating an unwanted situation. My personal opinion is that Hindi need not be made a compulsory subject in schools". O.P.Ramasamy Reddy's ministry resigned in the last week of March 1949, after which the compulsory study of Hindi in schools was also abolished. A year and a half after the introduction of compulsory study of Hindi in schools, it was therefore cancelled. E.V.R. raised his voice against the constitutional designation of Hindi as the official language of the Union. On his instructions, Anti-Hindi Day was held on January 10, 1950, and a meeting was held in Madras in which E.V.R. he declared that the imposition of Hindi was a planned attempt to enslave the Tamils permanently. Therefore, January 26, 1950, the day the new constitution came into force, was a sad day for the Tamils. As a result, Anti-Hindi Day was celebrated by D.K., on the tenth of every month, until July 1950.¹⁵

Third Attempt to Introduce Hindi, 1950

Despite two failed attempts, the Congress government made one more attempt to make the study of Hindi compulsory in schools. This time the Minister of Education was Madhava Menon, who on 2 May 1950 issued an order making the study of Hindi compulsory in schools. Annadurai issued a statement condemning the Congress government's move and also announced that a large procession would be taken out, demanding the abolition of the compulsory study of Hindi in schools. On July 27, 1950, revoke the order on the compulsory study of Hindi and make it optional.¹⁶ The Congress government has thrice embarked on the experiment of making Hindi compulsory in schools. The first order to make Hindi compulsory took two years, the second order one and a half years and the third only two months, but this move failed miserably due to vigorous opposition. The reason for the government's failure in these experiments to introduce Hindi was very simple. Compulsion was the main cause of anti-Hindi agitations. It is human nature to resist anything compulsory. The scene of struggle then shifted from the schools of Madras Province to the constitutional bodies, first the Constituent Assembly and then the Parliament and State Legislatures.¹⁷

Hindi Letters Wipe out Agitation Around this time, railway authorities began writing the names of railway stations in Hindi on station name plates. This caused considerable resentment among the Tamils and some of them spontaneously started smearing tar here and there on the Hindi letters, on the notice boards with the names of the railway stations. But E.V.R. wanted to show organized opposition to the imposition of Hindi by the railway authorities. The conference which met at Salem in June 1952 decided to delete Hindi letters from the names of railway stations and post offices on 1 August 1952. The Executive Committee of DMK which met on July 26 at the request of E.V.R., also decided to engage in the "Hindi Letters Erasing Agitation". He was least bothered by the actions of the government of E.V.R. and Annadurai decided to continue their agitational programme. Accordingly, on August 1, 1952, E.V.R. he led a mammoth procession of 5,000 volunteers in Tiruchirappalli, entered a railway junction and tarred the Hindi letters used on the name boards. On the same day, M.Karunanidhi, NagoorHanifa and M.S.Mani, leaders of thousands of D.M.K. volunteers, came in a procession, entered Trichy Junction and tarred the Hindi letters.¹⁸

After the agitations ended, the railway authorities rewrote the names of the railway stations in Hindi on the name plates. E.V.R. was enraged by this provocative action and decided to continue the agitation. So when he attended the Dravidian Agricultural Conference held at Mannargudi in Thanjavur district on 12 July 1953, he declared that the Hindi letters on the names of railway stations would again be erased on 1 August 1953. E.V.R., led a procession of thousands of volunteers D.K. in Salem and entered the station with only a few chosen followers. But E.V.R. Congressmen loitering all around the name board prevented him from approaching the board. Due to an argument between D.K volunteers and congressmen the growing crowd of D.K. the volunteers pressed forward shouting slogans against the congressmen who eventually fled the scene. Then E.V.R. tarred in Hindi letters, on name boards as planned earlier. On the same day, he erased Hindi letters on name boards of KuthoosiGurusamy at Madras Egmore Railway Station, T.P.Vedachalam at Tiruchirappalli Railway Station and A.P.Janarthanan erased Hindi letters at Tambaram Railway Station, Madras.¹⁹

Also the next year, on August 8, 1954, E.V.R. and D.K. volunteers smeared Hindi letters on the names of railway stations. This time the Congress government did not take any action against the agitators. E.V.R. he was angered by the government's lack of response and decided to intensify the agitation against the Hindi imposition. That's why D.K. The Central Executive Committee, which met at Truchi on 17 July 1955, decided to burn the Indian national flag on 1 August 1955 as a symbol of its opposition to Hindi imposition. In this context, E.V.R. undertook a whirlwind tour of Madras State from 22 to 31 July 1955 and urged his followers to participate in the agitation in large

numbers. The names of thousands of D.K. cadres started coming out who voluntarily participated in the agitation for burning the Indian national flag. Burning the Indian national flag was not just erasing Hindi letters on name boards. But this time there has been a change in the political scene of Tamil Nadu. K.Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Madras State on 13 April 1954. After E.V.R. declared his intention to burn the national flag, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru is said to have contacted K.Kamaraj and through Kamaraj passed on E.V.R. the message that he should not burn the national flag. On the advice of Nehru, K.Kamaraj announced on 30 July that Hindi would not be a compulsory subject in schools for examination purposes and Hindi would never be introduced by either the central or state governments. He further requested E.V.R. to desist from burning the national flag on his assurance. Around this time, probably at the suggestion of K.Kamaraj, there was also a remarkable change in the attitude of the railway authorities. Instead of Hindi letters in the names of railway stations, Tamil letters appeared first, Hindi next and English last. After this optimistic development and on the assurance of K.Kamaraj, E.V.R. respected his words and declared that he was suspending the Indian national flag burning agitation.²⁰

The Commission for Official Languages was appointed under the chairmanship of B.G. Kher, by the President of India, on 7 June 1955 to make recommendations to the President. When the Commission visited Madras on January 9, 1956, D.K. and E.V.R. he boycotted it, stating that the Commission was biased against Hindi. DravidarKazhagam volunteers led by A.P. Janarthanam staged a black flag protest against the Commission that day. The Commission submitted its report to the President on August 6, 1956 and it was placed in the House of Parliament on August 12, 1957. The report of the Commission on Official Languages has sparked a new dispute over the official language of the Union. The Government of Madras was not satisfied with the recommendations of the Commission. E.V.R. and Rajaji attended an anti-Hindi meeting together for the first time, organized at Nungambakkam, Madras, in September 1957. E.V.R. they approved of Rajaji's views on English and both announced their determination to continue the struggle against Hindi imposition. On September 23, 1957, E.V.R. in a specially organized function at Madras on 23 September 1957, presented with a silver sword for making all-out efforts for the successful conclusion of the anti-Hindi struggle.²¹

E.V.R. deplored the Union government's attempt to impose Hindi and stated that the separation of Tamil Nadu from the Indian Union would be the only way to defend Tamil Nadu from Hindi imperialism and to achieve this, D.K would start a series of agitations. As a first step D.K volunteers set fire to the map of the Union of India (except Tamil Nadu) on 5 June 1960. E.V.R. toured the whole of Madras State, encouraged D.K volunteers to participate in large numbers in the map-burning agitation. On the morning of 5 June 1960, E.V.R., K.Veeramani, Gurusamy, G.Imayavaramban and the leaders of the 'We-Tamil Movement', S.P. Aditan, taken into preventive custody. Despite this, thousands of D.K. the volunteers burned the map of the Indian Union (except Tamil Nadu) and all were arrested and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. On 23 April 1963, a meeting was held under the auspices of the Union Language Convention at Gokhale Hall, Madras. C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University, presided over the meeting where Rajaji announced that the constant crusade to keep English as an official language would continue. The following resolution was also adopted in the Convention. "Just postponing the imposition of Hindi will not serve any purpose. The substitution of Hindi for English will lead to national disintegration and damage the cause of good governance."²²

E.V.R and the Anti-Hindi Agitation of 1965

The Official Languages Act 1963 provided for the continuous use of English, apart from Hindi. In addition, Hindi is expected to be used for all official correspondence of the Central Government

after 26 January 1965.²³ M. Bhaktavatsalam, the Chief Minister of Madras, informed the Chief Ministers' Conference held on 13 December 1964 in Delhi that there was calm in Tamil Nadu. The government did not expect any trouble in the state. D.M.K. convened a meeting of the Executive Committee in Madras on January 8, 1965 under the chairmanship of R. Nedunchezian. At the meeting, it was decided to celebrate January 26, 1965 as a Day of Mourning. Although D.M.K. understood the importance of Republic Day (January 26, 1965), there was no other option as the Union Government chose this auspicious day to impose Hindi.²⁴

Student Protests

Students of universities, colleges and schools were mobilized to protest the imposition of Hindi across Tamil Nadu. On 25 January 1965, protest marches were held in most cities in Tamil Nadu. Students and the general public participated in the huge march. Violence against students by pro-government activists in Madurai and police firing in Chidambaram provoked students across Tamil Nadu. Bhaktavatsalam, the chief minister of the state, quelled the anti-Hindi student protests with brute force. The Indian Army, the Central Reserve Police Force and the State Police were engaged and fired indiscriminately at the protesters. Many people died in the shooting. Central Minister C.Subramaniam and Chief Minister Bhaktavatsalam promised that all necessary steps would be taken to prevent the imposition of Hindi. The students called off the strike on 12 February 1965. On 1 August 1968, the Indian Parliament passed an unenthusiastic Language Act. This Act did not meet the expectations of the Tamils and Hindi imposition continued.²⁵

E.V.R. he followed the development of the anti-Hindi agitation very keenly. On 17 January 1965 in Villuppuram, he expressed his opinion on Hindi that there was "no place for compulsory Hindi" now. E.V.R. he further wrote in Viduthalai that it was not an anti-Hindi protest but an anti-Congress protest. Kamaraj gave him an assurance that Hindi would not be imposed on the Tamils. This protest was indirectly imposed on the students by a political party. In order to gain political mileage and strengthen the voter bank, innocent students were victimized in this protest to gain popularity and gain power. This was a criticism of E.V.R. regarding D.M.K. on 19 January 1965. E.V.R. again on 8 February 1965, he asked Congress leader Kamaraj to explain the government's position on language policy, particularly on Hindi. Thus in 1965 in the anti-Hindi agitation of E.V.R. Hindi did not bother him much because he believed in Kamaraj. Moreover, he felt that the language problem was almost over. E.V.R. he readily seized the chance he got when Annadurai issued a statement on 10 February 1965 asking the students to give up the agitation. E.V.R. took this opportunity to criticize Annadurai. Further, as far as Hindi is concerned, he clearly registered his views that D.M.K. he is behind the scenes to gain their political advantage.²⁶

Mantle ship of Justice Party was assumed by E.V.R. in 1938. Since then his struggle against the imposition of Hindi in Madras State has been vigorous. For a while, language was considered the most important tool in creating a united India. This prompted Gandhi to argue that Bengal and Madras were two provinces that were cut off from the rest of India because of their lack of knowledge of Hindustani. Rajaji, the Prime Minister of the Madras Presidency in 1938, tried to bridge the North-South divide by making Hindi a compulsory subject in schools in the Madras Presidency. However, the controversial government order sparked strong protests from the Justice Party, led by E.V.R. and later D.K. headed by E.V.R. D.K. headed by E.V.R. and even D.M.K. led by C.N. Annadurai put forward a proposal for Dravidanada against the rule of North India. Nationalists' opposition to the English has been compared to Tamil revivalists' opposition to Hindi, on the common ground that Hindi and English are foreign languages. D.K. and D.M.K. they feared the declaration of the national language by Rajaji and other Madras State Congress chief ministers. Once the government order to introduce Hindi was passed in 1938, protest rallies

were replaced by intensified mass agitations at various levels. A second attempt to introduce Hindi was made in 1948 and a third attempt to introduce Hindi was made in 1950. After that, the anti-Hindi agitation was in full swing in Tamil Nadu in 1965. An agitation was carried out in Hindi at railway stations and other central stations for erasing Hindi letters government offices in Tamil Nadu. Eventually, the Congress government led by Bakthavatsalam backtracked on its stance on making Hindi compulsory in Tamil Nadu. The anti-Hindi agitation was seen as the beginning of the cultural awakening and Tamil revival in Tamil Nadu.²⁷

Conclusion

Periyar was a born revolutionary, although he was born in an orthodox family. Even in his formative period of life he was saturated with social ideals. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's radical stance was also exposed on the language issue. The EVR strongly opposed the imposition of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking areas. Along with his followers, he was involved in anti-Hindi agitations in 1938, 1948, 1950 and 1965. D.K. volunteers were also involved in erasing Hindi letters in public places and government offices. The anti-Hindi agitation of 1965 was massive and the role of E.V.R. and his followers in the 1965 agitation, was remarkable and was an important political development which paved the way for the victory of the D.M.K. in the 1967 general election and C.N. Annadurai, disciple of E.V. Ramasamy to become the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

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