

Learning from Hundred years of Dravidian Movement

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The centenary year of Dravidian movement being projected as 2016, there are desperate and euphoric attempts by different camps to evaluate the impact of the movement on the Non-Brahmin population in India in general and in the South in particular. One hundred years of social history of the country when two divergent movements, one in the South in the form of Dravidian self-respect and the other on the West in the guise of Brahminical Hindutva started almost on the same time but, deliver contrasting narratives today. The triumph of the so called Hindutva attributed to RSS and its political arm BJP and the gloomy presence of confused strategies of fragmented Dravidian protest in the political outfits of DMK, AIDMK and umpteen numbers of so called Dravidian parties in Tamilnadu seems to be a serious challenge for scholars to analyse the historicity of two contemporary phenomena. Interestingly, the role of the Left in the socio-cultural life of India is said to be not outstanding as they remained non-committal to the ideological postures of the two and the so called secular Congress and others are looked by people with suspicion. The role of the civil society in the area of social reform typically appears to be dismal?

The Dravidian movement characterised as the South Indian (composite Madras state) Non-Brahmin revolt against the social taboos imposed by the Brahminical Hinduism is being reviewed by scholars and commentators while the champions are preparing to celebrate the centenary year in December 2016. It is noted that the release of the Non-Brahmin manifesto issued by Thegarayar in December 1916 is the beginning of the movement. However academics and some of the Dravidian activists do not agree with the date of the beginning of the movement. In fact, Dr Subrahmanya Swamy wrote an article in Frontline during the NDA I regime in 2003 claiming that the Dravidian movement began in 1916 and is being fading away now. He has made interesting observations on the movement being an activist from Tamilnadu settled in Delhi. Dr.K.Veeramani, General Secretary of D.K has reacted to the article denying the allegations and protested against the distortions of Dr Swamy who held that, "In 1932, the (Dravidian) movement suffered a setback when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar rejected the British offer of separate electorates

for the Scheduled Castes, and sided with Mahatma Gandhi to sign the Poona Pact." Dr Veeramani retorted saying, "But what happened actually? Dr. Ambedkar accepted the British Prime Minister Ramsey McDonald's Communal Award, Gandhi stoutly opposed this and undertook a fast unto death, saying that he would give up the fast only if his alternative proposal was accepted. So Dr. Ambedkar was put to intense, unfair psychological pressure, rather coerced, and made to sign the Poona Pact which, again, was not fully implemented in the proper spirit. The Scheduled Castes and Dr. Ambedkar were betrayed. This strengthened their disillusionment with Gandhi and his party, and brought them closer to Periyar and his followers." It is interesting to note that the Dravidian movement is being evaluated with reference to the presence of scheduled castes in the movement and is being disparaged for the kind of assaults perpetuated against dalits in Tamilnadu mostly by the backward castes who are supposed to have been inspired by the Dravidian movement. Thus, some commentators inclined to call the whole movement is hoax. It seems the evaluation of a social movement that has been recorded as one of the greatest events in the social history of modern India whose leader Periyar EVR was labelled as the Prophet of New Age by UNESCO in June 1970 is a misdemeanour. There are hundreds of studies on Periyar and the movement undertaken both by Western and Indian scholars eulogising it as an epoch cannot be simply wished away as an ingenuous social outburst.

Scholars like M.S.Gore and other social scientists have developed parameters in contextualising and evaluating the achievements of a social movement. It appears that subjecting a movement like the Dravidian ideology of protest in terms of dalit bashing is unwise as Dalits are being subjected to lynching not only in the South where a social reform movement was present but it is much severe even in the home state of Babasaheb Ambedkar like Maharashtra where Phooley had a similar initiative much before Periyar. The evil is spread in to areas that were not known for such brutalities before. It is exactly for the reasons of discrimination, humiliation and inhuman treatment meted out to Dalits by caste Hindus and the tenets of Manu Dharma upheld overtly and covertly by the Dvijas , Phooley, Periyar, Ambedkar , Lohia and others critiqued Brahminism and not Brahmins. As one of the defenders of Dravidian movement Mr N. Nandhivarman General Secretary, Dravida Peravai put it, "the Dalit movement that is on the rise at

the dawn of 21st century is a natural offspring of the Dravidian movement. Wherever men claim equality and whenever all human beings seek equal rights, the spirit of the Dravidian movement will live there. No one can say that with the withering away of the Soviet Union, the Socialist movement is dead; the same logic and historical compulsions apply to the existence of the Dravidian movement." One may still differ with the views of the remorseful defendants, but we cannot reduce a social movement to a protest ideology merely on the basis of its temporary setback or unintentional flaws.

The greatest miscarriage of the Dravidian movement appears to be in its inward looking strategy of programme of action limited to select pockets of space, time and families. There are several impediments and shortcomings in the expansion of the movement beyond Tamil speaking areas. It was perhaps due to the Reorganisation of erstwhile Madras state as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu in 1956 reordering the Dravidian speaking language regions as four, the movement got divided?. Perhaps it was at this juncture the Dravidian spirit got fragmented and the Dravidian sensibility did not go beyond Madras. Though reformers like Tripuraneni, Thapi and others in Andhra, Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and others in Kerala and Brahmanetara Parishat, Veerashaiva sangh, Dharmalingam, Devraj Urs and others in Karnataka protested against the hegemony of Brahminism in social, cultural and political life of the people, they did not work however under a single platform. In fact the above movements in the South got their inspiration from Justice Party and Periyar. Yet, they did not go beyond their immediate regional needs and issues of the backward classes and dalits. It appears that they were all together to fight for the First amendment to the Constitution to uphold caste based reservations in the South based on Communal order issued in 1920s. They could do it in 1951 because the states were not formed at that time and Periyar and Ambedkar were alive to lead the movement. But, the Dravidian ideology seems to have watered down to that of defending caste based reservations after independence and reorganisation of the states. We cannot attribute the failure of the movement to Periyar alone as he became old and got exhausted and internal bickering in the movement through splits of Annadurai, later Karuananidhi, and MGR has further shortened the life of Dravidian upsurge.

A section of the critiques of Dravidian movement subscribing to the exclusionary vision from that of a section of the Dalits, reading the rationalist outburst of the Black shirts as negative due to their allegiance to Christianity, Islam and other faiths is not really conducive to make comments by the dispassionate observers. It seems the derisive elements have failed to look at the emergence of Hindutva and its expanding tentacles in Tamilnadu heartland as a threat to the Dravidian concept. Tactically, RSS as per a report in the Hindu in November 2014, appropriated the Dravidian symbols such as celebrating the 1000th year of the coronation of Chola King Rajendra I and able to attract people in the age group of 25-40 . The paper has cited Mr Sadgopan saying that, 'as the number of people coming to RSS grows, the BJP will get ideologically committed individuals,' and it has gained confidence after the resounding victory in Parliament elections. We do not have such statements by others who are joining the opposite camps. There seem to be very few attempts as of now to evaluate the impact of the new developments in the South on the social tensions.

Dravidian movement is not an upshot of Periyar or Tamilians and is not directly related to the so called Non-Brahmins alone. The concept Dravida as per pundits is a derivative of Tamil in Sanskrit and Periyar asserted 'there is only one language, and she is Tamil'. He went on to say that, "it is my firm conviction that the Kural was especially created to demonstrate that the arts, culture, ethics and conduct of the Tamils were vastly different from and antithetical to those of Aryans". In my Dravidian University Foundation day lecture I tried to bring out the origin of the word citing Iravatham Mahadevan, Asko Parapola and others that the name 'Harappa' itself constituted two Dravidian words *Hara* and *Appa* typical to South India. The Kharavela Hathigumpha inscription contains reference to Tramira countries and so on. Therefore, the Dravidian movement should have been an all-inclusive and culturally diverse campaign to bring in the historical significance of the first settlers in India. In fact a careful reading of the movement shows that several diverse movements are integrated and Periyar is shown as the leader of the movement. As EVR himself agreed that the Dravidian nation is very old and he wanted to bring in reform to bring all the groups together. In fact the self-respect movement, Anti-Brahmin movement, Caste – based reservations, Atheism and social reform etc are distinct genres of a large species of a binary called Aryan –

Dravidian classification in Indology/Dravidology that remained an orphan in academic discourse in an age of Post-colonialism. This appears to be typical to Indian scholarship in India compared to the Palestinian, Jewish, African etc identity movements based on common threads of links of blood, genetics, language, culture and history.

The contemporary political situation in the World where Donald Trump seemingly a German heir won and some NRIs identifying with him and the so called fringe groups in India parading openly supporting him indicate that Periyar and the Dravidian movement in a different form would re-emerge if the present trends are an indication. We do not wish that Indians whose destiny was sealed under the Constitution should respect diversity and pluralism to help create conditions of live and let live. The Dravidian movement has initiated a paradigm shift in our social relations in recent years that need to be carried with care. Otherwise the nation would again get divided and this time caste wars and communal violence would be diverted against those who are considered as responsible in maintaining divisions and despairs. Dravidian movement might disappear now due to cunning collusions and distortions of the select few under the weight of the movement's own limitations in the short run, but this would never vanish as long as discrimination, indignity and inhumanity are perpetuated in the name caste, religion, colour, language and culture.

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