

The Vanniyar Sangham and its Role in Tamil Nadu Reservation Policy

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Abstract— Due to the dominant of Brahmins, the Backward Class people were kept bottom of life educationally and economically. The Justice party and the Self-Respect Movement fought for the social justice vehemently. The follower of non-Brahmins movement Dr. S. Ramadoss formed an organization called “Vanniyar Sangham” to get equal opportunity in the government employment. Though, the Vanniyar Sangham was a caste based organization, it fought for the common man including Scheduled Class, Scheduled Tribes, Muslim and other minority people etc. Since beginning of the Vanniyar Sangham till Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) formation there had been long struggle for the social justice against the Tamil Nadu government for equal reservation. Due to the constant agitation of Vanniyar Sangham, the Tamil Nadu government accepted its demand only little bit and provided 20% reservation to the Vanniyar community in the folder of MBC category. Since there was not enough percentage of reservation to the Backward Class people in government employment the Vanniyar Sangham converted to a political organization to uplift the Backward Class people. This research paper reveals struggle of the Vanniyar Sangham for the social equality.

Keywords— Varnas, Backward Class Movement, Vanniyar Sangham, Reservation Policy and PMK party

1. Introduction

In a democratic country, the majority of the population should have access and due share in power and administration from the government. And the employment in government service will bring the justice like social status, educational and cultural development and secured future among the Backward Class. But In the caste dogma society of India, the backward class people have been denied to access the education and employability. In ancient period the hierarchy of Varna classified into four categories namely, Brahmana, Kshathriya, Vaishya, and Sudhra.¹TheJathi is classified as many number from the four Varnas.² The last category Shudra are kept in bottom of ladder. And also there was divided as sub-division from the Sudhra category called ‘Panjama’ it means polluted category ‘untouchables’ and it is apart from four Varna, later it considered as fifth Varna.³ In this Varna system, the Brahmins were considered as the highest class

and the Sudhras were lowest of the social stratum and they denied education and job opportunity in public employment. Among the Sudhra category the Vanniyar community was not except even though it has largest people strength.

2. Vanniyars Mobilisation

In the end of 19th century there was one caste organization established by some Vanniyar leaders called “Vanniyakula Kshatriya MahaSangam” in 8th April, 1888⁴ and the notable leaders AnnaswamyNaicker and GopalNaicker who look after the welfare of the Vanniyars. They wanted to get concessions from the British government through this organization. Though there was not any response from British rule, this MahaSangham continued to campaign and to conduct conferences, meetings by the various leaders. In the middle of 20th century, the Vanniya Kula Kshatriya MahaSangam convened a major conference on a state-wide basis in 1951.⁵ The conference main aim was that the Vanniyars should contest in the 1952 general election. The most notable leaders in the conference were S.S. RamasamyPadayachi, who belonging to Vanniyars Community and M.A. ManikaveluNaicker who belonging to Gounder Community joined and organised a political party with the toiling mass of the people called “Tamilnadu Toilers Party” (TNT).⁶ Later, there was split between them with the some misunderstanding. Then, M. A. ManickaveluNaicker started a new party on the name of “Commonweal Party” With the full support to the Gounder people from Kanchipuram, Vellore and Thiruvannamalai. Being the single largest community the Vanniyas did not get sufficient representation in Legislative Assembly and the Parliament in the general Election in 1952. Only three candidates from Commonweal Party contested for Parliament and all the three candidates won the election. But, in assembly election 10 candidates from the commonweal contested, just only six got success. And also the Tamilandu Toilers Party won 19 seats in the Madras Legislative and captured 4 Parliament seats.⁷

In the 1952 election, the Congress party failed to win a majority in the Madras state legislative and if there were not enough members to form the government the Congress (Rajaji) start to seek support to the Commonweal party. Finally, with the some demand the Commonweal party

accepted and gave support to the Congress. With help of the six MLA of Commonweal party the Congress formed the government. And return the Congress gave one Cabinet Minister Post for the M.A. Manickavelu Naicker.⁸ But, Toilers party remaining opposite until K. Kamaraj (Congress Party) assumed the office of Chief Minister in the year 1954. Even the Tamilnadu Toilers party decided to support K. Kamaraj ministry and also S.S. Ramasamy Padayachi was offered a minister post. So that the Vanniyars could occupy two minister seats out of eight in the Congress Government and both the party were dissolved and their members joined in the congress.⁹ In 1980s, Dr. S. Ramadoss (Medical practitioner) merged 28 previous Vanniyar Sangham (different name) with the one common name called, "Vanniyar Sangham" with the support of Farmers, Youths and educated people. Later, this Vanniyar Sangham converted as a political party "Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK).

3. Reservation Status

In 1954, K. Kamaraj regime, he took some effort and increased from 14% to 25% separate reservation was granted to the backward classes.¹⁰ When M. Karunanidhi became Chief Minister after Anna death in 1969, he enhanced totally 41% (25+16) were for the Backward Class including Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribes in Tamilnadu. Since it was not enough, E.V. Ramasamy agitated and requested to give 50% based on the Supreme Court order.¹¹ So, M. Karunanidhi government enhanced the reservation from 25% to 31 % for the Backward Class people and for the Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribes from 16 to 18 per cent was increased totally 49%.¹² And he also appointed the first Backward Class Commission under the Chairmanship of 'Sattanathan' to know status about the backward castes in 1969. The commission submitted its report in 1970 and its recommendation which is the total reservation for the backward classes should be raised up to 33 per cent, but the DMK government ignored the 'Sattanathan' recommendation and raised 31% to 33% (Backward Class) and remaining 16% (Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribes) totally 49% as above said.¹³

And also the AIADMK government appointed a Backward Class welfare Commission in 1982 under the A.J. Ambasankar.¹⁴ This commission submitted its report in 1985, the important recommendations, 1). The commission recommends that the creamy layer should be deleted from the backward class list 2). Special reservation should be providing to the MBC people like Vanniyars.¹⁵ But the AIADMK government did not do anything to the Vanniyar community based on the Amba Sankar recommendation. Although, more numbers of the people belonging to Vanniyars community they did not get adequate reservation in the government jobs and they were subjected to heavy sufferings. The following table

shows how the strength of the various communities was allotted the reservation.

Table 1: Tamil Nadu I.A.S. officers cast based list

257 I.A.S officers in Tamil Nadu based on 01.01.1980 Statistic				
Brahmins	Karkathar, SaivaMudaliar Forward Christians	Adidraavidars	Backward Class	Vanniyars
122	59	34	42	04 ¹⁶

As per the Statistic 01.01.1980, there were 257 I.A.S officers in Tamilnadu. Among them the Brahmins were 122, the Karkathar, SaivaMudaliar, Forward Christians were 59, Adidraavidars were 34, and Backward Class and other people were 42 numbers only. The Brahmins who should have got 84 seats instead of 122 seats. The forward class people who should have got 39 seats instead of 59, but the Adidraavidas who should have got 54 seats instead of 34 and the total Backward Class people who should have got 156 seats. But they only got 42 seats. Among the total 257 seats, the Vanniyar should have got 51 seats, but they got only 4 seats.¹⁷ So this table clearly shows us the Backward Class people could not get anything substantially.

4. Massive Protest of Vanniyars

Though, the Vanniyars are the highest strength among the backward class community in Tamilnadu, but they are not provided equal reservation based on their strength. So that, the Vanniyar people realize about the government negligence and they started to establish a Caste organization with the united support and fight for their rights, especially for reservation that could promote the welfare of their community. Thus, the situation was very pathetic condition among the Backward Class people including Vanniyar since the colonial period. But, in the end of the 20 century, under the leadership of Dr. S. Ramadoss who hails from Tindivanam at Villupuram district in Tamilnadu. He belongs to Backward Class community, especially Vanniyar community. He is follower of Dravidian Ideology of E.V. Ramasamy¹⁸ and Dr. Ambedkar. In their way Dr. S. Ramadoss agitation was against Tamilnadu Government and his aim was equal right for all community people. Then, he met all the leaders of 28 Vanniyars Sangham as different names and merged with one common name called, "Vanniyar Sangham" in July 20, 1980¹⁹ as full-fledged caste organization with the support of Farmers, Youths, Militants, and educated people etc.²⁰

The Vanniyars, who account for about 12 per cent of the state's population concentrated in its northern districts,²¹ especially in South Arcot, are the largest of the Backward

class population and this account is about one-fifth of the total Backward class population in Tamilnadu. But, they have been striving for social mobility and demanding equal share of state government services based on their population and they are still very backward, and the proportion of reservation benefits available to the Vanniyars was not even half of their quantity in the Backward Class population. So, they started to agitate the government, to get exclusive reservation of 20 per cent jobs and educational admissions for their community in the state and 2 per cent jobs in the Central government. Because, The following Table shows how the Vanniyars are being neglected by the Tamilnadu Government in Public Service Commission.

Table-2: Vanniyars list in Tamilnadu Government Employees

S- No	1984- 85 POSTS	Vacancy	Repre- n tation
1	Physical Director	20	Nil
2	Medical Officer	15	Nil
3	Labour Officer	12	Nil
4	Group V Service Junior Assistant in Tamilnadu Secretariate Service 1985-1986	100	5
5	Drugs Inspector	10	Nil
6	Assistant Director of Industries and Commerce	10	Nil
7	Agricultural officer (Research)	17	1
8	District Munisif	43	Nil
9	Agricultural Officer (Explain)	120	10
10	Assistant Surgeons	500	20
11	Group IV Services (1986)	3250	64 ²²

Since there was not enough reservation to the Vanniyars the Pattai Namam²³ (it means the Vanniyars are cheating by the Tamilnadu Government) was conducted to show how the Vanniyars were deprived by the Tamilnadu public service commission. So the VanniyarsSangham agitation was spread over in all parts of Tamilnadu against the government. The VanniyarSangham organized 25 district conferences and over 5,000 public meetings. It sent uncountable telegrams and more than 25 letters to the Chief Minister, M. G. Ramachandran,²⁴ pleading for a meeting to describe about the Vanniyars problems, and 15 letters to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Since there was not any action from both side, then it went ahead with processions, demonstrations, stopping the trains and the bus, started one-day road black agitation on 6th May 1986²⁵ During this one-day agitation no vehicle moved throughout Tamilnadu, and all the national high ways and the ordinary roads leading to the villages remained empty, most of the shops

were closed. More than 2 Lakhs of people joined in the agitation and 50,000 people were arrested; the agitation was in tensed in six districts. But no favorable news for the Vanniyars came from Tamilnadu government. Then, the Vanniyarsangham conducted, one day state level Train blocking agitation on 19th December, 1986,²⁶ all the trains were stopped inside Tamilnadu, demanding reservation in education and employment and immediate implementation of Mandal Commission's recommendations.²⁷ About 10 Lakhs of Vanniyars took part in the Train block agitation in 17 districts, and over 20,000 Vanniyars were arrested by the Tamilnadu Police.²⁸ When all these efforts and agitation were of no avail, the VanniyarSangham again conducted a massive protest one-week road-block agitation in from September 17, 1987 to September 23, 1987. This agitation turned very violent and destructive, died 20 persons in both police firing and clash between Vanniyars and Scheduled Class,²⁹ and led to the arrest of over 20,000 persons. Though the agitation was for the common purpose that the Backward Class must get sufficient reservation in the Government service, and eradicate poverty and backwardness. But, unfortunately the clash happen between Scheduled Class and Vanniyars.³⁰

During the agitation, M.G. Ramachandran government was in rule. Before discuss the reservation issue, M. G. Ramachandran suddenly died in December 1987.³¹ The DMK ministry under M. Karunanidhi leadership which assumed office after the January 1989 elections, ordered compartmental reservation due to the violent agitation of the Vanniyar peoples. Even the Vanniyars accounting for about 53 per cent of the Backward class population,³² it probably the least backward among them, the Vanniyars were expected to get the 20% share separately. But, the DMK government provided 20% reservation with the 107 communities including the Vanniyars with united folder in the name of Most Backward Classes (MBC).³³ Since compartmental reservation was not enough share among the Vanniyars,³⁴ and it was great insult and cheating play to the Vanniyars. So the Vanniyar leaders decided to form a Political organization to get more power for the Backward Class people's development including Scheduled Class, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims and other minorities etc. Then, Dr. S. Ramadoss formed a political party, on the name of PattaliMakkalKatchi (PMK, it means party for the toiling people) for the backward class people poverty alleviation with joint hand in July 16, 1989.³⁵ And also, the PMK party was apart from the caste hierarchy, that's why various communities' people were included and offered very important posts to them. Dr. S. Ramadoss (founder) from Vanniyar Community, A.Dheeran (president) from Vanniyar community, Dalit R. Ezhilmalai (Secretary) from Scheduled caste community, KunamKudi R.M. Hanifa (Treasurer) from Muslim community, P. Raman (Joint Secretary) from Arundhidiyar community, V. Palanichamy (secretary head office) from UrickkaraNaicker community,

R. John Pandian(youth secretary) from Devendra Kula Velalar community, S. Gopal (vice-president) from Vannar community.³⁶

5. Conclusion

Since the non-Brahmin movement established the backward class people gradually developing. According to reservation policy in Tamilnadu the Justice party had a crucial role³⁷ and K. Kamaraj Ministry enhanced 14% to 25% for the backward class people without any political expectation. But the DMK and AIADMK played an important role in the reservation policy with the intention of political expectation, "To stay in rule continually." Due to the dissatisfaction 20% reservation share with-in a folder, the Vanniyars decided to play identity politics based on caste. The Pattali Makkal Katchi, is an off-shoot of VanniyarSangam, its general principle was the common man development. But it had primary interest in the welfare of the Vanniyar community especially in its socio-economic development. The structure and organization of PMK is based on equal rights for all. That's why the PMK offered the very important post 'Union Minister' to Dalit Ezhilmalai. And the VanniyarSangham obtained 20% reservation after sacrifice of 21³⁸ person's life from the Vanniyar community.

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