

SELF RESPECT MOVEMENT

E.V.R

With the fall of Justice Party, once again the supremacy of the Brahmins flourished. Just to protect the Tamil people and Tamil language E.V.R.started a movement by which the supremacy of the Brahmins must be subdued and awakening must be created among the illiterate Dravidians who lived in the land like slaves. Their awakening must be towards self-respect through socio-religious awareness.

The early days of E.V.R.

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker was born on seventeenth day of September 1879 at Erode as the son of Venkara Naicker and Chinnathai Ammaiyan. He had his early education at the primary school of Erode. His teacher certified him as unfit for school education. Disinterested in education he started a business and kept it as his occupation. When he got interested in the social service, he left his business. Deeply interested in the welfare of poor and untouchable in the society he made close contact with them. Just at this moment he undertook a religious tour to the North which could not give him peace of mind and solutions to his problems. Returning from the North disappointedly, he involved himself completely in the struggle for freedom, so that the untouchability was to be removed and renaissance in the society was to be brought about.

E.V.R. Contact with congress Party:

Aspiring for the freedom of the land, he joined the congress party which fought for the freedom of the land. He involved himself whole heartedly in several struggles towards independence.

E.V.R. and Non-Co-operation Movement

E.V.R. participated in the non co-operation movement which was held in 1920 and was sent to prison twice. Attaining the respect of common people, he was elected Chairman of Erode Municipality in 1917. But he resigned his Chairmanship in 1919, so that he might absorb himself completely in the freedom struggle. Becoming popular among the political leaders, he was elected secretary of the state. Congress committee in 1921, and later as its president in 1923, When the Prince of Wales visited Tamilnadu in 1922, the state wide strike became highly successful in Erode, thanks to the efforts of E.V.R.

The struggle at Vaikom:

As the member of the Congress party E.V.R.indulged himself completely in the socio-religious problems. In those days low castes were not permitted to enter the temples by Brahmins. E.V.R. started a revolt against this. In 1924, the oppressed people at Vaikom, in Kerala State, protested against the inhuman attitude of the Brahmins and launched a historic struggle to get permission to enter the temples. This struggle attracted E.V.R. much. He also participated in this struggle with his wife Nagamaiyar and Kovai Ayyamuthu. Leaders, including E.V.R. were arrested. By his participation as a common leader in this inspiring struggle E.V.R. was called Vaikom Veerar by the people.

Prohibition struggle:

Deeply wounded by the consequences of liquor drinking E.V.R. was determined to start a struggle against this and social evil. When he picketed a toddyshop at Erode in 1921 his wife Nagammaiyar and sister Kannammal also participated the struggle. The first ladies who were arrested for picketing toddyshops in Tamil land were Nagammaiyar and Kannammal. This created a stir among the ladies of Tamil land. Propagating in favour of prohibition E.V.R. cut down his palm and coconut trees worth Rs.10,000/- which were used for preparing toddy.

His withdrawal from the Congress Party:

As an active member of Congress party. E.V.R. insisted on racial representation and representation on the basis of population. This principle was brought against Brahmins, The three percent of the Brahmins held 99% of the high posts. Protesting this E.V.R. brought a resolution in the congress conference held at Kanchipuram Desirous to get the support of the Brahmins, the congress neglected and dismissed this resolution brought by E.V.R. Moreover, E.V.R. condemned V.V.S. Iyyar an active participant of the congress for holding separate rows for Brahmins in his gurukulam, at Cheramadevi. But the Congress party did not mind this condemnation of E.V.R. and acted against it. Thus E.V.R. felt separate and left congress party.

Self Respect Movement

After leaving the congress party, E.V.R. did not start a new movement immediately then. E.V.R. having great popularity among the people was invited by the leaders of the Justice party to join them. Being a sincere patriot E.V.R. expected congress party to change its attitude for the welfare of the society. Acting quite contrary to this expectations congress merged into a political movement. Having lost the confidence he had in the Congress party. E.V.R. started a new movement in 1925, known to be 'Self Respect Movement'. Constituted for the uplift of the common people self-respect movement had become a freedom movement The main aim of this movement was to create self confidence and advanced thinking among the people. To achieve this goal, this movement insisted on the renaissance of Tamil Language and opposition to Brahmin supremacy. E.V.R. expected socio-political awareness among the downtrodden people through this movement. As it had attracted the common people very much, it spread slowly and steadily throughout Tamil land within a short period.

The doctrines of Self Respect movement:

The doctrines of this movement found expression in tile speeches of E.V.R. to the people between 1926 and 1973. This movement insisted self respect, opposed the supremacy of Brahmins and instigated people against it. The self respect movement of E.V.R. based on same aims and principles was registered legally in 1925.

The principal aim of this movement was to create awakening among the illiterate rightless people who were under the clutches of high castes. This movement was very particular about brining in the life of people self-respect through self-thinking and relief from slavery. The unnecessary rituals and superstitions, followed by the Hindu religion were severely opposed by this movement. Opposing the existing defective social system, this movement requested the government to give equal rights to all the people.

Trying to remove the low status in society, this movement insisted on equal right to women like that of men. It wanted to bring about change in the marriage system and severely criticised and opposed child marriage. Moreover, it encouraged love marriage, intercaste marriage and re-marriage of widows. This movement also demanded the government to register these marriages in the registrar's office under the civil law. Having deep interest in the welfare of the people, this movement requested the government as well as the common people to establish and maintain orphanages and centres for rehabilitation of widows and educational institutions.

Spreading of the doctrines:

The doctrines of the self respect movement were spread among the people through public meetings and dramas held by E.V.R. For this purpose he toured the country frequently. News Papers were published to add to its effect. His public meetings at Madurai, Chengalpattu, and Virudhunagar were of great historical

importance. In these meetings, resolutions were passed against untouchability, caste system and capitalism. Awakened by the inspiring doctrines of E.V.R. countless Hindus, Christians and Muslims participated in the public meetings and conferences held by him. Many books containing advanced thinking were published by him. So many organisations were constituted by this movement against caste atrocities and religious superstitions. Among them Superstition Eradication 'conference' held at Salem in 1971 was of great importance. In the procession in connection with the conference the idols of gods, were carried and cow dung and chappals were thrown on them. Though he was arrested several times for such activities, he opposed and fought against social maladies courageously and with iron determination.

Anti-Hindi agitation and E.V.R.

The Congress party was victorious in the election of 1937 and the ministry was formed under the head of Rajaji. Then learning Hindi became compulsory in schools E.V.R. made this issue into a political storm. Anti-Hindi agitation by thousands of students and common people spread all over Tamilnadu. Police opened fire to subdue this riot, in which Thalamuthu and Nadarajan were killed. Several leaders including E.V.R. were arrested and imprisoned. E.V.R. was given imprisonment for a year. E.V.R. who lived in the hearts of people, was elected as the leader of Justice party in 1940, when he was in prison.

Foreign tour of E.V.R.

After he had spread the doctrines of self respect movement he went on a foreign tour, in 1932 to Russia, Germany, Greece and Turkey, So that he might be aware of the progressiveness and living standard of the people there. He came to understand by the tour that the defective system in the Tamil society was only due to economic inequality.

Dravida Kazhaham (D.K.)

The Justice party began to decline in importance, with its failure in the elections of 1937. Under these circumstances E.V.R. re-constituted the doctrines of the party and formed a new party called Dravida Kazhakham. Putting forth Dravidianism, he demanded a separate Dravida Nadu, comprising of the four linguistic areas of Tamilnadu. Andhradesa, Kamataka and Kerala. In favour of this demand a resolution was passed in the conference at Salem in 1944. This party was to hold flag with full black and a red circle at the centre. The black colour indicated Dravidian movement and the red colour indicated the thinking of people. The disciples of the patty had several organisations and associations, black shirt association was conspicuous among them. The innumerable branches of this party throughout the land spread the doctrine of the party among the people very quickly. This party had a new phase with the coming of C.N.Annadurai, M.Karunanithi, and V.V. Ramaswamy as the disciples of the party.

The Achievements of D.K.

One cannot under estimate the contribution of the self respect movement towards the deliverance of common people from the merciless dutches of high castes in society. The credit goes to this movement when it has relieved the common people of their supertitious beliefs. Moreover, it set free several downtrodden people who were slaves of society and religion and directed them in the right path. Due to the conscious and continuous efforts of this movement, he government has passed several acts towards the welfare of the socially backward people. The Hindu marriage act of 1967 largely accepted the marriages conducted by self respect movement. In addition, to this, act afforded equal rights to both men and women. Pure Tamil literature made their appearances under the patronage of the movement. This Dravida movement paved way to the appearance of several organisations towards social welfare. Finally, this movement put forth great efforts

to reduce the domination of Brahmins and increase the participation of non-brahmins in politics.

The fall of the party:

The highly flourishing Dravida Movement met with a sudden fall. The main reason for this was the second marriage of E.V.R. with 28 year old Manniammai who worked as his secretary, at the age of 72 in 1948. This act of E.V.R. upset the followers of the party. So he lacked confidence in his leadership. His followers opposed and criticised his action. Some disappointed disciples of E.V.R. formed D.M.K. under the leadership of C.N. Annathurai. This schism made Dravida Kazhaham very weak. The great social reformer who tirelessly worked for the welfare of the Tamil people breathed his last due to disease at the C.M.C. Hospital Vellore at the age of 94, on December 24, 1973.