



## INFIGHTING IN THE D.M.K. AND FORMATION OF TAMIL NATIONALIST PARTY- A POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN TAMIL NADU

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### ABSTRACT

*Infighting among the political parties in the Twentieth Century was a common phenomenon which also ensured political development. All major political parties in Tamil Nadu had witnessed groups of factions in the colonial and post-colonial period. It was very common in the Indian National Congress. There were Egmore Group and Mylapore Group, Moderates and Extremists, No-Changers and Pro-Changers, Rajaji Group and Satyamurty Group. Against the trend of Congress, Rajaji also formed the Swatantra Party in 1959. In the Justice Party, infighting developed on the basis of language and region. Factional groups were also witnessed in the DMK which was formed in 1949. Against the rise of C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi, E.V.K. Sampath formed a group and this trend led to the formation of the Tamil Nationalist Party in 1961. This article illustrates the circumstances which consequently prepared the political rise of the Tamil Nationalist Party in 1961 out of a split in D.M.K.*



**KEYWORDS :** D.M.K., D.K, C.N. Annadurai, R. Nedunchezian, M. Karunanidhi, EVK Sampath, Kannadasan, V.P. Raman, Dravida Nadu, Tamil Nationalist Party.

### INTRODUCTION

From the Justice Party in 1944 the Dravidar Kazhagam (D.K.) was born and from the D.K. the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) was started in 1949. The D.M.K. was formed by young Dravidian leaders under the leadership of C.N. Annadurai, whom these young leaders and followers affectionately referred to as "Anna" (Elder brother of all the little brothers). In 1949, Annadurai openly stated that D.M.K. was initiated in order not to oppose D.K. and that the goals remained the same for both parties and that the only difference was the methodology.<sup>1</sup> In 1955, the choice of R. Nedunchezian as General Secretary of the D.M.K., replacing C. N. Annadurai, was the result of a small brawl between E.V.K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi. E.V.K. Sampath, nephew and talented propagandist of E.V. Ramasami, had been a valuable addition to the newly formed D.M.K. Initially, E.V.K. Sampath (along with Nedunchezian, Mathiazhagan, N. V. Natarajan and M. Karunanidhi) was one of the main leaders of the party. Although Nedunchezian was elected General Secretary in 1955, Sampath was considered by many to be the number two in the party.

When the D.M.K. founded, Annadurai had announced that the general secretaryship would rotate among the top to avoid any kind of totalitarianism that would characterize the D.K. From 1949 to 1955 Annadurai was Secretary General. In 1955, when Annadurai attempted to implement his rotation plan, both E.V.K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi actively sought the general secretaryship. It was

agreed that Nedunchezian was a compromise candidate. At this point, however, there were no factional groups in the party. The infighting remained a hostility between individuals rather than between organized and cohesive groups.<sup>2</sup>

The roots of factionalism in D.M.K. can be traced back to the founding of the *Murosoli* newspaper by M. Karunanidhi in 1954. While organizing news agencies in remote villages, Karunanidhi also organized party sections and a support structure for himself. Gradually he began to ask its branches to support some candidates for taluk and district offices, and for the General Council. He did favours for many people in the party and thus earned their loyalty. Karunanidhi tended to gather the pragmatic elements of the party around him. At internal party meetings, he stated that politics is a business, like any other business. In any case, Karunanidhi's reputation for pragmatism and giving of favours meant that those who wished to earn money through the party found refuge under the umbrella of Karunanidhi, especially through the party's ties to the film industry. The relationship between the film industry and the party was more symbiotic than parasitic. The party had spread valuable propaganda and developed additional organizational infrastructure through its film connections, while specific films and actors have gained more popularity through D.M.K. connections.

The main faction developed in D.M.K before 1961 was associated with E.V.K. Sampath.<sup>3</sup> The organization of the Sampath faction did not extend its influence far below the General Council and the higher leadership levels, except for a student component. Indeed, Sampath did not have the basic support ladder that Karunanidhi possessed, but in some crucial points it had the support of the majority in General Council and Executive Committee of the General Council.

However, in 1961 Sampath had left the party. He argued that "non-political" characters like film actors and playwrights played too important a role in party affairs. They often had priority over party platforms. Often, audiences were more interested in seeing and hearing movie stars than political speakers. Sampath argued that the emphasis on film actors and those related to the film field would make the party cheaper, and his stance was likely based on more than fear that movie stars would eclipse D.M.K. party. Karunanidhi was prominent in the field of cinema as was Annadurai and had recruited movie characters to work at parties. Most of the people in the cinema related to the party were in the Karunanidhi group.<sup>4</sup> Those who were not part of the group were followers of Kannadasan, a film poet and song writer whose feud with Karunanidhi in the film industry led some members to his side. Kannadasan's followers later identified with the Sampath faction.

Another question was related to the bureaucratization of the party. Sampath insisted that the D.M.K. should be devoted exclusively to politics. In this, he had undoubtedly been influenced by his position in Delhi Lok Sabha.<sup>5</sup> He was not satisfied with the D.M.K. as a social reform movement and as a political party. The D.M.K. it sponsored many cultural activities and participated in social reform activities, and Sampath felt that these activities were not political. He also felt that D.M.K.'s degree of involvement with the film industry has mitigated development as a full-fledged political party. For Sampath, at least at that time, Congress set the standard for what a political party was and how it should be organized, but Karunanidhi and Annadurai were reluctant to change what had become a successful party formula. They did not oppose the party's growing routinization, but they disagreed on the methods and speed of the transformation.

Yet another problem was the party's ideology. Among the lower-level party cadres, Sampath was seen as a defender of the party's radical ideological goals against the pragmatic Karunanidhi. At least some lower-level leadership support from the Sampath faction was based on this misunderstanding of their intentions. Many party members who opposed the party leadership have turned away from radical social reform and attributed this change to Karunanidhi's influence and took the opportunity to oppose him. However, this view of Sampath's position was incorrect. Among the high-level leaders, the key ideological question was what to do with Dravida Nadu's request. and Sampath argued that the matter should be dropped immediately. He personally felt that Dravida Nadu was not feasible and that if the Delhi Government banned the separatist parties, as seemed likely, the DMK would be destroyed.<sup>6</sup>

Within the ranks of the highest leadership, the idea of obtaining a separate Dravida Nadu had already been seriously undermined. The central role in this process was played by V P. Raman, a Brahmin who had joined the party in 1958 and quickly assumed a leadership role. Raman was a wealthy and talented lawyer who was fluent in English. Because of his talent and symbolic value as a supporter of the Brahmins, Raman was increasingly assumed party posts in particular by writing articles for the English press. After 1958, Raman's spacious house in Madras became a center for Mofossil (rural) leaders and those of the City of Madras. Every night the top leaders met there to talk. At that time the party did not have a seat that it could serve as a gathering place. Annadurai lived and worked in Kancheepuram. Raman has continually questioned the feasibility of reaching Dravida Nadu in these sessions. He argued that the provinces of Kerala, Mysore and Andhra Pradesh did not support the idea that it would be impossible to achieve. Furthermore, if Dravida Nadu is impossible attempts can be made to obtain a separate Tamil Nadu. Even though the Dravida Nadu demand is popular, it may not be economically and militarily feasible.

Raman's reasoning eventually convinced enough leaders to lay the groundwork for a meeting at his home in November 1960 to discuss the whole issue. Annadurai was not present and, in fact, did not know that the meeting was taking place. At this meeting it was decided that Dravida Nadu's request be publicly withdrawn. The top leaders of D.M.K., namely Karunanidhi, Nedunchezian, Sampath, Raman and Mathiazhagan were present and in agreement. Mathiazhagan, however, was restless because of the absence of Annadurai, and called him to Kancheepuram after the meeting. Annadurai arrived in Madras immediately and another meeting was held at Raman's home. There Annadurai pointed out that since party cadres had developed in request for separation, the party could not simply abandon this request and maintain credibility in the eyes of lower-level leaders. But he promised to gradually prepare the party to abandon Dravida Nadu's request.

Distorted rumors of the meeting at Raman's house and the discussion about Dravida Nadu leaked, creating confusion at the party. Sampath chose this moment as a propitious time to ask for internal reforms. This was also the time of the elections for general secretary. Then the problems arose in a contest between Sampath and Karunanidhi for the general secretary of the party. Karunanidhi, seeing an opportunity to discredit his dangerous rival, began to cautiously oppose Sampath. Firstly, Karunanidhi came out in defense of film actors and others related to the film industry. Tempers got so high that Sampath was attacked at a D.M.K. meeting by mercenaries allegedly hired by one of Karunanidhi's lieutenants, Madurai Muthu.

For those idealists who saw the party degenerating after 1957, Sampath promised revitalization. Many believed that Sampath was a radical on the issues of Dravida Nadu and social reform. Within student groups, as well as in some D.M.K. unions, Sampath supporters came out openly and Sampath's factions were organized. At least part of the support for Sampath's students stemmed from the students' anger at the 1958 decision in which Annadurai agreed with Congress proposals to limit student political activity. T. K. Ponnuvelu, the leader of the Dravida Manaver Munnetra Kazhagam (Progressive Association of Dravidian Students), was bitterly opposed to this limitation. However, he eventually agreed. Other student leaders were less easily convinced, believing the agreement conflicted with D.M.K.'s interests, as it was the D.M.K. that had the fastest growing student organizations.

The surge of support for Sampath that stemmed from the misunderstanding of Sampath's position on Dravida Nadu and other issues had begun to worry Annadurai. Annadurai had largely remained on the sidelines of this factional dispute and had been silent on the election of the secretary general. Nedunchezian's mandate had shown how insignificant it was to have someone other than Annadurai as general secretary, as Annadurai continued to make important decisions. Annadurai probably knew that the full effect of Sampath's proposals would be detrimental to the party as he, more than anyone else, appreciated Dravida Nadu's emotional and symbolic importance and the importance of tactfully managing its abandonment. Annadurai then began to silently oppose Sampath. Karunanidhi immediately absorbed the chances of the situation and maneuvered an overconfident Sampath to directly challenge Annadurai.

Sampath was once put in a position to challenge Annadurai and once Annadurai himself abandoned neutrality, which he did in a series of articles in his journal, *Dravida Nadu*, entitled "All are kings in this country". Sampath had lost.<sup>7</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1961, Sampath made an indefinite fast at Madras to initiate action against certain prominent leaders and workers because an attempt was made to attack Kannadasan at Trichy, a supporter of the former.<sup>8</sup> Together with V. Munusami, the then Mayor of Madras and a member of the Sampath faction, Sampath erected a pandal (covered platform) near a local high school and decorated it with the black and red flags of Kazhagam and began his fast. Since he was a member of Parliament at the time, fasting attracted considerable press attention. In the English newspapers, the D.M.K. had previously received very limited coverage. Now, however, both the *Hindu* and the *Mail*, the two leading English newspapers in the Madras State, reported on the D.M.K. factional dispute. Annadurai and other senior leaders of the Kazhagam were forced to go to Sampath to try to solve the party's problems. The D.M.K. leaders K.A. Mathiazhagan, N.V.Natarajan, A.V.P.Asaithambi and R. Nedunchezian, who were all in Sampath camp or sympathized with Sampath, worked hard during the fasting period to reach an agreement. Annadurai said he was worried and often went to see Sampath.

As a result of this infighting, there were clashes within the City Corporation Council that the D.M.K. had controlled since 1959 and even a clash within the Madras Legislative Assembly between members of the D.M.K. on opposing factions. On the third day of Sampath's fast, Annadurai assured him that every effort would be made to locate the forces of evil within the organization and eradicate those elements without fear or favor.<sup>9</sup> He also deplored the tendencies to resort to violent behavior for ventilate political differences. "I am as concerned as Sampath in not only preserving the integrity of the party," he said, which we build with tears and work, but also in ensuring that the organization is held to the highest standards of purity and discipline. I could see today the signs of a change in mentality that Mr. Sampath wanted."<sup>10</sup> It was in February. But soon the surface unity collapsed. The followers of Karunanidhi and Sampath continued to criticize each other vehemently and finally Karunanidhi and Sampath renewed their verbal attacks. Annadurai wrote a series of articles criticizing Sampath. The problem of Dravida Nadu was resolved when Annadurai decided not to abandon the request for secession. Annadurai had firmly joined the Karunanidhi camp, forcing Sampath to submit or leave.

For his part, Sampath was apparently tricked into thinking that more members would go to the party with him than were actually willing to. A.V.P. Asaithambi, grandson of K. Kamaraj and editor of a Tamil magazine, was a supporter of Sampath, as was Kannadasan, who was also the editor of *Thenral*, a Tamil magazine, T. K. Srinivasan, frequent collaborator of *Dravidam*, C. P. Arasu, editor of a Tamil magazine, Anbazhahan, former professor, a Tamil scholar and a powerful speaker, T. K. Ponnuruvelu, a prominent student leader and K.A. Mathiazhagan, one of the main founders and leaders of the party were among his followers. But when Sampath left the party, only Kannadasan left with him. V. Munusami, who was Mayor of Madras, left temporarily, but quickly returned to the prospect of a long period in the political desert to build a new party.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to know the reasons for the exit of important leaders with Sampath. At the same time, it is also important to know the stand of the leader of the D.M.K. party in 1961. They were all well known about the ideology of E.V.K. Sampath. Were they present at the meetings at V. P. Raman's home or knew from reliable sources of EVK Sampath's departure. They were also familiar with the notion of Sampath regarding the revitalization of the party and the ideological differences between Sampath and Annadurai or Sampath and Karunanidhi. The differences between these leaders were central. The official abandonment of Dravida Nadu as a request was fundamental. Another problem was the role of the film community in the party and the use of theater as a vehicle for the party's political propaganda. These problems were not powerful enough to drive them out of the party, even under the umbrella of a politician of Sampath's stature.

Secondly, in 1961, the D.M.K. was sufficiently institutionalized and a sufficient number of leaders had developed concrete interests in the party for the organization to be a compensatory force against the centrifugal tendencies of the factions. Many of the best leaders they have supported

Sampath were reluctant to leave the party because they had been instrumental for the development of the D.M.K.

However, pragmatic explanations are not enough. There was also a deep attachment to Annadurai. Many high-level leaders, although temporarily at odds with Annadurai, were reluctant to permanently end that relationship. He was still "Anna" (Elder Brother) to many of his former Thambis (siblings). For others, Annadurai represented the last and feeble hope of achieving ideological goals. Having a material and opportunistic interest in the party, the agitated leaders were not willing to leave the party for ideological purposes.

About ten thousand D.M.K. members left the party with Sampath.<sup>12</sup> There was much confusion among these lower-level party supporters about what exactly Sampath represented. There was the mistaken impression that Sampath was going to lead the agitation for Dravida Nadu's success. Sampath left the party on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1961 and immediately organized a new party, the *Tamil Desiya Katchi* (Tamil Nationalist Party) (T.N.P). Soon Karunanidhi and other frontline leaders of the D.M.K. dubbed the *Tamil Desiya Katchi* as 'Little Congress'.<sup>13</sup> The new Party's main goal was an autonomous Tamil state with the right to separate itself from the federal structure.<sup>14</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> July, he explained the party's goals, calling for a separate and sovereign Tamil Nadu within the Indian Union. "If a state cannot function satisfactorily due to central government controls, that state had the right to separate and sovereign. Such states should have absolute power to collect taxes and spend the money as they see fit."<sup>15</sup> Explaining why his party members had left the D.M.K., he said that "the request for a separate Dravida Nadu was not feasible, it was just a dream".<sup>16</sup> He also accused the Kazhagam of generating false hope in the public and claimed that it had no support in the neighboring states of Kerala, Mysore and Andhra Pradesh. Note that even when Sampath abandoned the demand for a separate Dravida Nadu, don't call it undesirable, simply "not practicable".

When it finally became clear that Sampath was in favor of abandoning the Dravida Nadu issue, many of those who left the party returned, so the T.N.P. never got off the ground. Its main activity was to expose the stand of D.M.K. leaders on the Dravida Nadu issue. The T.N.P. eventually merged with Congress in 1964, joining the Kamaraj faction, where several followers of E.V. Ramasami were already settled firmly.

The transformation of the radical objectives of social reform (anti-Hinduism, atheism, etc.) must be distinguished from the intra-party (and possibly public) rejection of Dravida Nadu. While radical social reform was modified and redefined due to the perception of public hostility, Dravida Nadu was abandoned because it was deemed not feasible. As early as 1958 there were rumors of an action by the Indian Government against the secessionist parties and all the main leaders had privately pledged to save the party from destruction, even if it meant abandoning Dravida Nadu.<sup>17</sup>

The mobilization of the lower castes changed the nature of the effective political community and made the propaganda of radical social reforms (such as atheism and anti-Hinduism) no longer viable for a party seeking the support of the masses. Dravida Nadu's rejection was a party's response to social, economic or cultural change. Indeed, the demand for separation resurfaced in 1968 and remains a backdrop for contemporary political life in Tamil Nadu. Eliminating the undercurrent of separatist sentiment would imply a formidable shift, as separation from Dravida Nadu (and / or Tamil Nadu) is a way of expressing or symbolizing Tamil /Dravidian political identity.<sup>18</sup> The rise of Tamil cultural nationalism took place in this context. The separatist sentiment has been weakened but not eradicated.<sup>19</sup>

As the D.M.K. was transitioning from movement to party, its support base was also increasing among lower-caste non-Brahmins, the urban lower-middle class, and particularly young people. Annadurai and the D.M.K. appealed to the lower caste non-Brahmins who define the D.M.K. as the party of the common man, the middle man, the ordinary Dravidian. The concept of social reform has redefined and transformed from significant attacks on religion and Hinduism to the raising of backward castes.

More importantly, the concept of backward non-Brahmins did not become an alternative to Dravidian political identity as it could have. The concept of the non-Brahmin as a political entity

vanished from public use after its fragmentation into "forward" and "backward" segments, and was replaced by the Dravidian political identity. The "common man" was the embodiment of Dravidianess in D.M.K.'s wording. This weakened any ideological opposition between "backward" and "advanced" castes and, needless to say, this perception of political reality subsumed the class conflict to the Dravidian nationality. Annadurai even made a great effort including the Brahmins into Dravidian nationality.

The factional dispute that dissolved the party in 1961 was a manifestation of the ferment that accompanied the organizational and ideological transformation. The transformation from movement to party was a multidimensional process which involved the routinization of the party's bureaucratic structure, the political socialization of the party leadership and the transformation of objectives. The ideological and organizational transformation posed new problems for the party. The dilemma of the 1940s and 1950s was how to attract mass support and extend engagement with party ideology and Dravidian political identity in a changing political arena. The problem of the 1960s was how to maintain and extend support after abandoning the key objective of the break with Dravida Nadu and after the transformation into a political party.

Thus, factional struggle was very common among major political parties and also gave rise to new political parties. These new parties separated from the parent parties in the long term rarely successful and very often unsuccessful. Many of these new splinter political parties have sprung up and disappeared from the political scene. The D.M.K., which came out of D.K., is a successful political party, while the Tamil Nationalist Party (T.N.P.) was not successful in the political journey. When E.V.K. Sampath and Kannadasan left from D.M.K., they didn't become popular and couldn't get massive support. But C.N. Annadurai and M.Karunanidhi were mostly successful politicians in Tamil Nadu and attracted the masses. This article also reveals the reasons for the success of C.N. Annadurai and M.Karunanidhi, and the failure of E.V.K. Sampath. Furthermore, it defines the position of these leaders on the Dravida Nadu issue that shook Tamil Nadu before D.M.K. formed its ministry under C.N Annadurai in Tamil Nadu.

#### END NOTES

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