

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE MADRAS STATE (FROM 1925-1947)

Dr. P. Venkateswaran

Assistant Professor, PG & Research Dept of History, Govt. Arts College (Men), Krishnagiri - 635 001

Abstract

The Industrial revolution in the 18th century made a great change in the western countries. The writings of Rousseau, Karlmarx and Fredrick Eagels were responsible for the outburst of many revolutionary movements in the world which led to the class struggle. Hegal's ideas explained by Karlmarx and practiced by Lenin gave the communist ideas to the people. Spreading of this ideas motivated to the Russian revolution in 1917. The victory of Russian revolution in 7th November 1917 made its people equal among themselves. The victory of October revolution made the colonies of communist feelings.¹ The intellectual climate of India in the twenties were also favourable to communism.² The early activities of the communist party of India revolved around the personality of Narendra Nath Battachariya better known as M.N.Roy, a gifted Bengali who represented all those qualities that could be expected from a child of the most revolutionary province of India.³ Roy established his headquarters at Tashkand, where he formed a revolutionary school and commence to train Evlin Trent Roy, Abani Mukerjee, Rosa Pittinghop, Mohammed Ali, Mohammed Shabi Siddiq and M.P.T Acharya are and selected Muhajiria as communist agents.⁴ In may 1921, the III International summoned in Moscow all prominent Indian revolutionaries within their reach in order to select a suitable leader to direct work against India. In August 1921 Roy was selected as the most suitable individual to direct operators against India.⁵

Keywords: *Industrial revolution, Karlmarx, Narendra Nath Battachariya, communist, E.V. Ramasami Naicker, Singaravelu*

Roy has recommended the formation of his most recent interceptions, He also recommended the formation of a regular communist party in India, it should have a dual organization, legal and illegal.⁶ On 11th June 1923 Simla, Government of India Home Department Indian office sent a secret report on Indian community, that to counter M.N. Roys organisation and propaganda to terminate the activities in India. At the same time warrant issued for the arrest of leading communist prepagaters like Shaukat Usmani, S.A Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Ghulam Hussian and M. Singaravelu Chettiar of Madras.⁷

Between 1921 and 1925 the communist groups were operating in different parts of the country. In 26th Dec 1925 these groups gathered together at a conference in Kanpur and formed the Communist party in India.⁸

The communist party of India sets itself the goal of ending all forms of exploitation of man by man and establishing a socialist and ultimately a communist society in which individual liberty, freedom of speech, press and association as well as the right of political organization including the right of opposition to the Government shall be fully safeguarded.⁹

In Tamilnadu the Communist Propaganda was spreaded by M.Singaravelu Chettiar In November, 1922 1922, M.N. Roy stated in his letter to Singaravelu Chettiar that: *Either the congress must revolutionise its outlook and have a revolutionary organization or a new party must be formed with a programe in accordance with the needs and desires of the majority of the people with a revolutionary objective.*¹⁰

As a result of Roy's contact M.Singaravelu Chettiar become interested in communism, got into tough through the post with Roy and have since taken an active Part in forming Communist groups in Madras.¹¹ Before this M. Singaravelu Chettiar started "Hindustan Labour Kisan Party" in 1923 and Labour Kisan Gazettee a Fornightly and Thozhilaalan (Labour) a weekly.¹² After that he started 'Labour Political Party' in order to safeguard the working classes and to help them to put up their own candidates to capture seats in the Corporation. He laid Special stress on the need for a Labour Party as a separate political entity.¹³

M.Singaravelu Chettiar the man who headed the communist conference at Kanpur. Actually Saklatwala was invited to head the conference, but he was not allowed, to enter into India.¹⁴ During the period 1926-29 the Party made considerable progress and mighty working class movements were launched.¹⁵ The Labour interest was well caputured by the communists whose number was gradually increased.¹⁶

Saklatwalla, the leading communist activists leader visited Madras in 18th Feb 1927. He propagated the communism in Municipalities. He called the Labourers to Join in the Trade Unions and agitate for higher wages with the help of the congress leaders.¹⁷

In the State the communist party organized revolutionary Trade Unions in different industrial centres and railways. These attempt made the trade union movement a vital part of the anti-imperialist struggle. Their propaganda was directed against imperialism and aimed at instilling socialist consciousness among the working class.¹⁸ In 1928 the south Indian railway organized a general strike, Singaravelu Chettiar was the President.A conspiracy case was launched against Singaravelu Chettiar and other Trade Union activists before a special sessions court presided over by K.P. Lakshmana Rao. All the accused were sentenced to the imprisonment.¹⁹ In 1930-31 the congress activists who Participated in the communist activities were also arrested.²⁰ In 1932 the congress associations were declared unlawful organization. The Government of India however consider that it would not be found so useful against communist organizations which usually work in secret and have no purposed to attract attention or permanent headquarters.²¹

From 1933 onwards communist wanted the basic theory of maximum in their Party. At the same time the Labour Party was planned to organize on the basis of the socialist pattern.²² The Communist Party of India and its branches, and the young workers league of Madras, which was functioning in this Presidency in conformity with the objects and programme of the Communist International have been declared unlawful association in September and July 1934 under the criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908.²³ In the meantime some people were functioning as extremist manner to act as communist Party, it functioned as a group having

system of the control and organized form.²⁴ At this moment the rationalist and reformist E.V.Ramasamy Naicker returned from USSR in 1931 a fiery revolutionary advocating the overthrow of the government by violent means. He translated the “Communist manifesto” into Tamil. His extremist politics landed him in prison for sedition. Freed in 1934, he was invited by some of the big land lord Justice Party leaders to take over leadership of the stagnating party, but on condition it should be an anti-Congress form and not from anti-British. He made great propaganda against the Congress Party.²⁵ On the otherside the Propaganda of Singaravelu made E.V. Ramasami Naicker to visit Russia and it made him to fuse socialist ideas in his Self Respect Movement. The Self-Respect Movement propagates the achievement of communist programme on constitutional lines.²⁶

At the same time Singaravelu presided over the meeting organized by Madras State Labour Congress, Madras Municipality Sangam and Socialist Party to remove and restriction on the Communist in March 1938.²⁷ And the communists had condemning meeting on the criminal Law Amendment Bill in the central Assembly calling upon the Public to prevent recruitment and criticizing the provincial Government for using the criminal law amendment against anti-Hindustani demonstration and for publishing the Press notes on communism.²⁸ Since communist was banned many communist functioned in the congress socialist party.²⁹ When the congress party assumed Ministry in 1937, the communists expected that the demand against the capitalists will be fulfilled, but the government did not do so.³⁰

Instead of that the Government published a Press note drawing attention to the nature of the communist programme and warning the Public against becoming unwillingly involved in the movements.³¹ The period 1937-39 was marked also by the increased strength of the organised Peasant movement reflected in an increased in the membership of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), although unevenly in South India. The advance, union came in the make of a series of partial struggles against feudal land lordism and imperialist oppression, was particularly striking in the Madras Presidency.³² The working class of India as conducting several extensive strikes for better conditions and for national and social emancipation. A prominent feature of the labour movement during this period as solidarity strike - action and joint worker-peasant demonstrations which succeeded in forging the fighting unity of the working people, irrespective of religion, caste or nationalities. The organized, caste or nationality. The organized trade union movement made rapid strikes in the Madras Presidency, particularly in the Coimbatore industrial centre. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) increased its strength among the organized working class, made inroads into the strength of other organizations, and became the rallying centre of the whole labour movement. A distinctive feature of the working class action during this period was the clearly political character of the demands raised by vanguard sections.³³

The Congress government as criticized by left nationalists and others for Pro-capitalist leanings. The critics remarked that sections of the industrialists supported the Congress because the latter looked after their interests. The use of the police force by the Congress

government during the textile workers strike in Madras, and incarceration and deportation of some of the labour leaders by Congress governments in various districts in the Madras state, were pointed out by the critics to prove that the Congress governments favoured capitalist interests.³⁴

During the war time the communist Party issued pamphlets, leaflets and illegal communist literatures, Particularly the Swanthra Bharat, but they are seized and some important communist leaders S.V. Ghate, A.S.K Ayyangar and P.Sundarama Reddi were arrested.³⁵ Some students from Annamalai University were arrested on 13th December 1940 for circulating communist literatures. The arrests made all the class students for a mass demonstration against the Government activities. The Police threatened with lathi charges on the students, some 30 students injured in this incident.³⁶

Communist and student organizations have been devoting a good deal of their time to collecting money for the Bengal relief fund a subject which is occupying a good deal of public attention. Communist have been continuing their attempts to increase their hold both on Industrial labour and on ryots in the rural areas. A new organization called ‘Mathar Sangham’ started to devote mainly to spread among women.³⁷ In Madras and Madura special meetings for women and children were conducted for their local grievances like that of introducing rationing of rice in the city.³⁸

In the meantime, in 1941 Germany captured Russia, Russia supported the country which follows socialist. The capitalist countries like England, France, America decided to destroy the socialist build up Russia and the socialism.³⁹ In this situation Indian National Congress and Gandhi kept mum. Gandhi started Quit-India movement without bothering communist situation in Russia, This made Indian communist to separate from the congress and concluded to function separately.⁴⁰ After the second world war people looked fresh, the congress and communist fall in separate line the communist tormented the Government fall in the possible ways. They formed labour unions in the city and the Mofussil areas, set up village food committees, formed strikes in mills, factories, dockyards and essential services, incited agricultural labourers against their lands, in the anarchy was let loose by them compelling the Government to take stringent measures to preserve public peace and safeguard public interest.⁴¹

In 1944 the communist activity turned towards labourers. In Madras Buckingham and Carnatic Mill workers formed a separate union that is “Madras Labour Union,” then the trouble in Tinnevely at Vikramsingapuram mills, Lakshmi mills in Koilpatti and a kisan conferences in Tanjore by S.V. Parlaker of Bombay, then a branch of the friends of the Soviet Union at Madras by T.V. Kalyanasundram Mudaliar, a conference of the Railway labour union organized by P.Ramamurti a most prominent communist of this province, at the same time communists were busy, with the Chittavalayam Jute Mills.⁴²

Congress Leaders are growing increasingly jealous of the influence of the communist party. They have started forming congress kisan committees and political increasingly jealous of the influence of the communist Party. They have started forming congress kisan committees

and it is working to check the growth of the communist Party.⁴³ In Coimbatore and in Madurai there is a growing rivalry between the communist and congress organizations, In Coimbatore the District Magistrate reports that the communists controlled Textile workers union have been trying to work up the feelings at their respective followers.⁴⁴

The communists following the Philosophy and strategies of the international communists movement wanted all agricultural lands nationalized and the industries also controlled by the State. Since the congress did not accept outside the legislative, bringing the peasants and workers on their side. The condition of the country seemed ripe to the communists to launch such a battle.⁴⁵ The communists took active participation in the common challenges to the common in the Madras Presidency. The representatives of the communist party were the pioneers in the abolition of zamindari system in the Madras Presidency. The clash between the Congress Party and the Communists came into the fore in the Madras Legislature not only the Zamindari abolition question but, more seriously, on the question of labour unrest in urban areas.⁴⁶

The clash between the Congress Party and the Communists came to the fore in the Madras Legislature for not only on the Zamindari abolition question but, more seriously, on the question of labour unrest in the urban areas. The communists, following the philosophy and strategies of the international communists movements, wanted all agricultural lands nationalized and the industries also controlled by the state. Since the congress did not accept these solutions, the communists decided to take their battle outside the legislative, bringing the Peasants and workers on their side. The condition of the country seemed ripe to the communists to launch such a battle.⁴⁷ In the mean time the clash between the communists and congress are inevitable. Communist continue to criticise congress for not having accepted the Muslim League terms at the Simla conference and several meeting were held in Madras at which this view was expressed, clashes between the two organizations continue and seem to have spread to some of the Southern district also.⁴⁸

In 1946 election had widened the rift between communists and congressmen, In Madras the communists instructed their workers not to shout slogans praising Gandhi or other Congress leaders.⁴⁹ A plenary session of the communist was held where it was decided to contest the elections for the provincial legislature, and intensifying their campaign for capturing voters through intervention in trade unions and by Labour agitation in general.⁵⁰

In the 1946 election the communist placed their candidates wherever it possible. The congress labour sub-committee have held a series of propaganda meetings and appealing for support to the Congress candidates as against the communists. On the communists side P.C. Joshi has been on an intensive Tour throughout the Presidency for the election.⁵¹ Election held in Madras Presidency Congress got full majority C. Prakasam formed his ministry after a long gap.⁵² In this election communist captured two seats. Polling in many constituencies except labourers was full, and in a number of cases apparent of the Congress forfeited their depots. Communists candidates appear to have been uniformly unsuccessful except in the Railway

Trade Union and west Govadari cum, kisan cum, Gundur (Non-Union) Factory Labour constituencies.⁵³

A meeting of district and Local committee members of Tamilnadu held and they discussed about the future programme of the party. In this meeting the Congress was condemned as a capitalist ridden organization and it was decided that Communist organization should strengthen their hold on the workers and should present the congress from capturing labour, by all means including violence. After the congress party assuming power they proposed to maintain a sustained agitation over the grievances of Kisans and Labourers if necessary by Co-operating with other parties like the radical democratic party, the Dravdarkazagam.⁵⁴

Congress antagonism to communists is becoming increasingly manifest in the labour field. In North-Arcot the Congress speakers have been exhorting the workers of Gudiyattam mills not to resort to strike and assuring them that congress would take up their cause and would redress their grievances. They also advised workers to liquidate the labour union organized by communists and to join the Congress. In Coimbatore, Communists organized the various classes of labour union in a 'United Form' against the Congress.⁵⁵

At the same time Communists continue to decry the Cabinet Mission and a leaflet was produced in Madras city entitled "Get out of India Communists memorandum to the British Ministers Clash with Congress supporters also continued Sir P.R. Ganesan, an influential communist leader. Speaking at a meeting criticized the Congress for carrying on "False Propaganda" against communists.⁵⁶ The Communists are opposed to the Congress acceptance at the long term proposals of the cabinet mission.⁵⁷

In the same year Southern Railway strike at Trichinopoly, held it was of the biggest magnitude known in the labour history" in Madras.⁵⁸ In this strike the savage activities of police killed 4 labourers and wounded 100. Further 1050 Trade Union leaders including Anand Nambiar, and P.Ramamurthi, the communists members of the Madras Legislative. 23 Presidents and Secretaries of branch union were also arrested.⁵⁹ Coimbatore mill workers who were on strike for two months, finally the mill reopened in August 1946.⁶⁰

The Communists wished to bracket the Anti-Zamindari and the anti-capitalist struggle with the anti-imperialist struggle, whereas the Congress believed that the anti imperialist struggle should be a natural endeavour., while the problems of the small farmers, agricultural and industrial labourers, should be left to the Government to be solved.⁶¹

When the Communist influence generated among the weaker section of the society tensions and conflicts arised. In this situation C. Prakasam Ministry issued an ordinance in January 1947, called the maintenance of public order Act, assuming special power to deal with the situation.⁶² It provided for preventive detention, imposition of collective fines and censorship, control of meetings, procession camps, drills and parades, requisitioning of property and control of essential service.⁶³

The Communists following the philosophy and strategies of the intentional communists movement, worked all agricultural lands nationalized and the industries also controlled by the

state. Since the Congress did not accept these solutions, the Communists decided to take their battle outside the legislative, bringing the peasants and workers on their side. The condition of the country seemed ripe to the Communists to launch such a battle.⁶⁴ In this critical situation C. Prakasam was forced to resign his chief ministership by Non-confident motion and O.P.Ramasamy Reddiar became the chief minister of Madras. From the acceptance of office by Reddiar to the Madras Presidency upto 1950 as marked by a series of political disturbances. The communists all over India organized industrial and agrarian strikes, held demonstrations made anti-Government speeches, terrorised their opponents and incited the people to do all sorts of violent acts against the state and against the mill. They even attacked the factory owners, the zamindars and the landlords, with the help of the Home Guards, Civil Guards and special police officers, Reddiar suppressed the atrocities of the communists. And order as reentered in the state.⁶⁵

Government granted amnesty to communist detainees and prisoners on the occasion of the Independence Day Celebrations in August 1947, hoping that this act of clemency would bring a change in the attitude of Communists and in their Party's policy towards the national governments, both in the centre and in the states. Contrary to these expectations, there has been no change in the attitude of the Communist party and its members have been consistently criticizing the Government with a view to undermine public confidence in them. It is abundantly clear from their recent speeches and writings that their object is to capture power by discrediting the Government.⁶⁶ Their activities have become a serious menace to the maintenance of law and order and by taking advantage of the present food scarcity and by criticizing the Government Policy of decontrol and derationing they are endeavouring to create labour and agitation troubles throughout the province.⁶⁷

In early the Government of Madras thought of using the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Act 1947 against the Communists. But all communist detainees were released in 15th August 1947.⁶⁸

References

1. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Ranadine B.T., *Communist Iyyakka Varalaru* (Tamil) Chennai 1990 P.50
2. Vajpeyi. J.N., *The Extremist Movement in India*, Allahabad, 1974, P.265
3. *Ibid*, P.266
4. *U.S.S.F*, No. 493, 9.7.1924
5. *Ibid*
6. *U.S.S.F*, No.403 dt. 24-03-1923
7. *U.S.S.F*, No. 493, 9-7-1923
8. S.S. Patagundi, *Political Parties party system and foreign Policy of India*, New Delhi, 1987, P.28
9. A. Moin Zaidi., *The Annual Register of Indian Political parties*, New Delhi 1974, P.199

10. U.S.S.F., No.493, 09-07-1924
11. *Ibid*, (see also) Vajpeyi J.N., *Op.cit*, P.279
12. G.O. No. 946 Public (Gen) Confidentialdt. 10-09-1934
13. H.F.M Bundle No.71
14. K.Murugesan, *Singaravelu Then India*, Chennai, 1991, P.P. 198 - 199 *Mudal Communist*,(Tamil)
15. A.Mointzaidi, *Op.cit*, P.204
16. J.N. Vajpeyi, *Op.cit*, P.260
17. H.F.M., Bundle, No.71 & No.70
18. P.Ramamurti, *The Freedom Struggle and Dravidan Movement*, Madras, 1987, P.30,
19. *Ibid*
20. K.Murugesan, *Op.cit*, P.222
21. U.S.S.F, No.931, dated 1-9-1935
22. K.Murugesan., *op.cit*, P.223
23. U.S.S.F No.931, dt. 1-9-1935, (or)H.F.M. Bundle No.101, 1936-1940-P.G.
24. K.Murugesan, *Op.Cit*, P.225
25. *Economic Political Annual Number*, February 1974 P.221
26. U.S.S.F, No. 931, dated 1-9-1935
27. K.Murugesan, *Op.cit*, P.36
28. *Fortnightly Report second half of August 1938*
29. K.Murugesan, *Op.cit*, P.227
30. *Ibid*, P.231
31. *F.N.R*, 1st half of August, 1938
32. *Economic Political weekley Annual Number*, February 1979, P.P. 394 -395.
33. *Ibid*
34. A.R. Desai., *Recent Trends in Indian Nationlism*, Himalaya Publication house, Bombay, 1973, P.191
35. *F.N.R*, 1st half of March, 1940
36. *F.N.R*, 1st half of November, 1940
37. *F.N.R*, 1st half of October, 1943
38. *F.N.R*, 1st half of November, 1943
39. Harkisan Singh Surjet, *Op.cit*, P.74
40. *Ibid*, P.76
41. B.S. Baliga, *Madras in the Struggle for Freedom*, Govt. of Madras, Madras, 1957, P.38
42. *F.N.R*. for the month of March, April,May, June, July, 1944
43. *F.N.R* 1st half of May, 1944
44. *F.N.R* 1st half of May, 1944
45. S.Krishnasamy.,*The Role of Madras Legislative in the Freedom Struggle 1861 - 1947*, New Delhi, 1989, P.343

46. *M.L.A. Debates* Vol.2, January-February 1947.
47. S.Krishnasamy., *Op.Cit*, P.343
48. *F.N.R*, 1st half of August, 1945
49. *F.N.R.*, 1st half of Oct, 1945
50. A. Moin Zaidi, *Op.cit*, P.204
51. *F.N.R* 1st half of March, 1946
52. S.Krishnasamy.,*Op.cit*, P.334
53. *F.N.R*, 1st half of Feb, 1946
54. *Madras Legislative Assembly*, Debates, Vol.II, 1946 P.P. 1325-1326
55. *F.N.R*, 1st half - April 1946
56. *F.N.R*, 1st half April, 1946
57. *F.N.R*, 1st Half July, 1946
58. *Madras Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol.II July/Sep 1946, P.1325
59. *Ibid*, P.1441
60. Saroja Sundarajan, *March to the Freedom of Madras Presidency 1916-1947*, Madras 1989, P.633
61. S.Krishnasamy, *Op.cit*, P.345
62. *Ibid*
63. B.S. Baliga., *Op.cit*, P.39
64. S.Krishnasamy., *Op.cit*, P.343
65. B.S.Baliga., *Gazetter of Madras districts*, South Arcot, Government of Madras, Madras 1996, P.P.115-116
66. *U.S.S.F*, No.31, Dt.07-07-1948
67. *Ibid*.
68. *Ibid*.