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**Political Science**

**E.V.RAMASWAMY AND CONGRESS IN TAMILNADU**

**KEY WORDS:**

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The Congress, meanwhile, concentrated on building up its party. Its party men set up committees in villages and spread its ideals. The Congress organization and propaganda slowly gained effectiveness. A group of Congressmen, led by S.Sathyamoorthy and his allies, proposed that the Congress should enter the Legislature. On May 1, 1934, Delhi announced the general election. In the 1937 general elections, the Congress defeated the Justice Party and formed its ministry under C.Rajagopalachari. But in 1939, the Madras Ministry resigned, along with other Congress ministries in other provinces because of Britain's attitude towards India in the Second World War. Even during its short term in office, its record of legislative activity was quite impressive. It passed the Debt Relief Act, the Temple Entry Act, the Sales Tax Act, and the Prohibition Act. These indicated the zeal with which the Congress functioned in Government. In 1938, E.V.Ramaswamy, the leader of the Self-Respect Movement, was elected the leader of the Justice Party who had been in the political scene of Tamil Nadu from the early years of Twentieth Century.

From 1907, E.V.Ramaswamy took an active interest in the Indian National Congress. He took interest in Municipal affairs. He was an elected Chairman of Erode Municipality. C.Rajagopalachari and E.V.Ramaswamy were fast friends. C.Rajagopalachari was quick to realize that E.V.Ramaswamy would admirably suit the purpose of defeating the Non-Brahmin Movement. Hence he encouraged E.V.Ramaswamy to take a leading role in Congress activities. E.V.Ramaswamy was actually given the promise when he enrolled himself in Congress in 1919 that the Congress was in agreement with the principle of communal representation, advocated by the Non-Brahmin Movement. Further, he was led to believe that 50% of the Government jobs would be set apart for Non-Brahmins and that the Congress had no intention of contesting the general election.

E.V.Ramaswamy fully believed in these assurances and went on pressing for acceptance of his resolutions on communal representation at various committee meetings and conference of the Congress held every year, at Tiruchirappally in 1925. Madras in 1923, Thiruvannaimalai in 1924, without avail. Finally, E.V.Ramaswamy attended the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee Conference at Kancheepuram in 1925, ready for a show down with the Brahmins. At this conference, he submitted two resolutions recognizing the principle of communal representation for Non-Brahmins in the public services and representative bodies. These resolutions were disallowed on the grounds that they had already been rejected by the Subjects Committee. At this point, E.V.Ramaswamy and several other Non-Brahmins in the conference walked out. E.V.Ramaswamy lingered on in the Congress for a month or more, acting as a member of the Khadi Board. In 1925, he left the Congress and found himself free to start an organization of his own.

While in the Congress, E.V.Ramaswamy had gained recognition and fame in the Madras Presidency by his picketing of liquor shops in 1922 for which he was imprisoned and kept in Coimbatore jail. Further, he had played a leading role in Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924. A conflict arose over the question of untouchables using certain roads outside a temple in Vaikom in Travancore State.

E.V.Ramaswamy arrived in Vaikom on April 13 and he was imprisoned for a month in Travancore. After his release, he began the agitation, and again he was arrested to serve a sentence of six

months. Finally the prohibitory order was removed by the Travancore Durbar. E.V.Ramaswamy got a lot of acclaim and he was given the title, 'The Hero of Vaikom'.

Another incident, in which E.V.Ramaswamy was involved, was the agitation against the separate dining enforced for Brahmin students at the Gurukulam in Cheranmadevi, Thirunelveli District, established in December 1922, by V.V.S.Iyer. As a result of Non-Brahmin pressure, V.V.S.Iyer resigned the post as the Head of the Gurukulam in May 1925. The publication of Kudi Arasu as a weekly was registered on January 19, 1923 and the first issue was published on May 3, 1925. Through the weekly, E.V.Ramaswamy carried out incessant propaganda to arouse Dravidian people from age long stupor and infused in them a true sense of human dignity and self-respect. He wrote and published nearly two hundred books which formed the backbone of Tamil literature in the field of free thinking and rationalism in the 20th Century. After his exit from the Congress in 1925, he started working for the destruction of the Congress. He began to attack congress programmes in a relentless manner. In doing this, he contradicted himself because the policies he attacked were those he had agreed with passionately earlier. He attacked Khadi and Prohibition on the grounds that States were incurring heavy losses by enforcing prohibition.

With the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and its gradual evolution into a nationalist movement, came the Swadeshi struggle of 1905-1908. Patriots like V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subramania Siva played an important role in this struggle, which also witnessed militant action by the emerging working class. However, with the split in the Congress between moderates and extremists, the nationalist movement subsided for a brief while. To stem the rising tide of the freedom struggle, the colonial rulers systematically resorted to a policy of divide and rule. In the context of Tamil Nadu, they were greatly assisted in this by the failure of the Congress leadership to resolve the question of caste oppression and social inequalities imposed by a rigid caste system, characterized by the domination of Brahmins, who were numerically a small number. The growth, by 1900-1910, of an urban Non-Brahmin upper caste elite, largely located in Madras City and their strong resentment of the near-monopoly of professional and public offices occupied by a small coterie of elite Brahmins in the City, provided fertile soil for the colonial rulers to play their game. Motivated European scholarship and the colonial rulers consciously fostered the concept of a pure Dravidian movement and a Dravidian language struggling against 'Aryan' domination. In 1916, the South Indian Liberal Federation (popularly known as the Justice Party) was formed, ostensibly to uphold the Non-Brahmin cause.

Under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, the system of diarchy was introduced and elections were held to the legislature under a limited franchise. The Congress did not participate in them because of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The Justice Party came to power and formed ministries in 1920 and 1923 under the Raja of Panagal. These were followed by an 'Independent Ministry' in 1926 under Dr.P.Subbarayan. Following Sattanathan (1932), one can trace the evolution of what started out as the Non-Brahmin Movement in three phases: first, up to 1926, dominated by the Justice Party; second, the leadership of E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, affectionately known as Periyar, from the starting of the self-respect movement in the 1920s to 1949; third,

post-Independence, the emergence of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and after. These different phases reflected the several strands within the Non-Brahmin Movement: the Justice Party, largely representing the interests of landlords and mercantile capitalists and in close collaboration with the British rulers; the self-respect movement, rational and atheist in outlook, essentially fighting a democratic battle against caste hierarchy, social inequality and obscurantism and Tamil linguistic nationalism, represented by the undivided DMK.

With the growth of an anti-imperialist, pan-Indian national consciousness in the 1920 and 1930, the Justice Party went into rapid decline. In the elections held in 1937, under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Congress was elected to power. The ministry headed by C.Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), held office until 1939 when Congress ministries throughout the country quit office, following the outbreak of the Second World War. Because of the failure of Congress to address and resolve the issues of caste and social inequality, Periyar initiated the self-respect movement which played an important and progressive role in bringing to the forefront issues of caste oppression and social equality. However, Periyar's failure to take an anti-imperialist stand led to an unfortunate confrontation between the pan-Indian nationalist movement and the struggle in Tamil Nadu against caste and other social evils.

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