



ROLE OF AYOTHIDASA PANDITHAR FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES IN TAMIL NADU

Dr.T. Vennila

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Kandaswami Kandar College,
 P-Velur (T.K), Namakkal (D.T)

Abstract

Scheduled Castes previously known as untouchable, is a name for people belonging to the lowest stratum castes in India. They were excluded from the four-fold Varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth Varna, also known by the name of *Panchama*. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and various other belief systems. Scheduled Caste is the official term for Scheduled castes as per the Constitution of India. Pallars, Parayars and Pulayars are the lowest of the low, lived under the yoke of agrestic slavery. They have had lowest social status in the traditional Hindu social structure but James Lochtefeld, a professor of religion and Asian studies, said in 2002 that the "adoption and popularization of [the term *Dalit*] reflects their growing awareness of the situation, and their greater assertiveness in demanding their legal and constitutional rights". "*Backward Classes of citizens*" means the class or classes of citizens who are socially and educationally backward, as may be notified by the Government in the Tamil Nadu Government Gazette, and includes the Most Backward Classes and the Denotified Communities. For their growth and development Pandit C. Ayothi Dasar did a lot in Tamil Nadu.

Key words : Pallars, Scheduled Castes, Sangham, Untouchables And Self-Respecters

Pandit C. Ayothi Dasar was born on 20th May, 1845 at Asarampalayam, a hamlet in the Coimbatore District. His surname was Kathavarayan. Due to the affection shown by his teacher towards him, he called his name by the name of his teacher Ayothi Dasar.¹ As his first wife died, for the second time he married Dhanalakshmi. Through the first wife he got a blind son, named Dasaratha Raman and through the second wife he got four sons and two daughters.²

In 1870 at Nilgiri he established Advaitandanda Sabha, a religious organisation. At this juncture he was well-versed in Tamil Prapandas, Savite works, Bible, Islamic, Buddhist and Jain works, and also learnt a good knowledge in Ancient Tamil Literature. He had keen interest particularly in Philosophy.

He was a great rational thinker and spread rationalism since 1875, even before the birth of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker in 1879 in Tamilnadu. Hence, he was the forerunner to Periyar in spreading intellectual thoughts.

Dravida Mahajan Sangham

In 1881, Ayothi Dasar founded Dravida Mahajan Sangham. The Sangam represented the cause of the Scheduled people to the Government. It placed grievances about communal atrocities, educational facilities for untouchable students, equality in public life and reservation in employment.³ In 1885, he started the magazine Dravida Pandian. Rev. John Rathnam served its editor. The magazine exposed the pathetic condition of the Scheduled people. He was the author of a number of enlightened books. His work entitled History of Lord Muruga, History of the real Brahmins, and History of the false Brahmins exposed his thoughts against Hinduism, Brahminism and the cultural and political dominance of caste-Hindus in the caste ridden society. Eventhough these books are published posthumously the thoughts contained in those books are discussed in various stages and other magazines of his life time.

Right from the beginning of his public life, he was very much interested in promoting and the welfare of his community people and worked to defend their dignity. As he had deep knowledge in the ancient literature, he placed the



Cover Page



view that the untouchables are the Adi-Tamils and in 1886 he spread the view that the untouchables are not Hindus. When the census was undertaken, he insisted that term Adi-Tamils instead of untouchables.

In 1890 Ayothi Dasar founded the Dravida Mahajana Sabha to represent their grievances and requirements to Government.⁴ His wife's elder brother Rettamalai Srinivasan formed another association known as Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha two years later. These two organisations tirelessly represented the problems of the untouchables to the Government. Consequently the Government of Madras appointed S. Srinivasaraghavayengar to study their condition. His report depicted the pitiable condition of the untouchables and recommended to the Government various measures.

The Madras Government accepted the reasonable demands of the untouchable leaders and issued different favourable orders.⁵ Which provided all possible succour to the untouchables of Tamilnadu by establishing schools and allotting lands to the landless and ex-servicemen among the untouchables. Furthermore, many members of the Scheduled society were given postings in the administrative set up. They began to serve in public services at various levels such as Sirasthars, Engineers, Surgeons, Inspectors, Managers, Registrars, Head-Writers and Guards.⁶

To press for further reforms the untouchable leaders attended the Madras Mahajana Sabha Conference in Madras in 1892. C. Ayothi Dasar and a few other untouchable leaders, who participated in it, put forward proposals to the Government for the assignment of promboke lands to them and establishment of more schools. R. Srinivasan, another Dalit Leader reiterated this proposal in a conference at Wesley High School in Madras in 1892. In another Public Meeting in Madras C. Ayothi Dasar openly flayed the Indian National Congress as an association of the Brahmins and accused those Brahmins of occupying key-posts in the British Administrative set up and preventing the officials from doing anything for the untouchables.⁷

Resolutions of Dravida Mahajana Sangham

Under the leadership of Ayothi Dasar the first conference of Dravida Mahajana Sangham was held on 1 December 1891 at Ooty. Ten important resolutions were passed. They are

1. In all the villages schools should be opened to the Scheduled people and 50% concession be given to them in fees payment.
2. Punishment to be given to those who treat the Scheduled people as untouchables.
3. Government scholarship should be given to the first three Scheduled students who secured highest marks in the Matriculation Examination.
4. Government jobs be provided with the Scheduled who passed Matriculation Exams.
5. Government should not hesitate to provide employment opportunities to those eligible candidates.
6. In order to bring the problems of untouchables to the attention of the Government, the Government should select the Scheduled Caste members as representatives in villages and towns. On eligibility criteria the Scheduled class people should be given jobs.
7. The Jail Manual Regulations No. 46A, punishes the Scheduled people who involved in Public Service should be removed.
8. The Scheduled Caste people should be allowed to draw water in public wells.
9. In Government officers, the Scheduled Caste people should enjoy the right to sit in chairs and benches and those caste-Hindus who prohibits them should be dismissed.
10. The village officers and Managers are mostly caste-Hindus. They provide conduct certificates to the Scheduled Caste people. In practice they are against Scheduled Caste people. Hence the Dalit members be appointed as officers in villages. Further the Scheduled Caste people be given opportunities to meet the District Collectors when they visit the villages and to ventilate their grievances to the latter.⁸



Cover Page



Generally, these resolutions were aimed at civil rights, educational concessions, Government removal of certain services objectionable including rules in the jail regulations and overall advancement in Government services including that of village officer. The Sangham sent copies of these resolutions to the government and all the socio-political bodies.⁹

In 1898 he along with P. Krishnaswamy and Col. Olcott, the founder of Theosophical Society went to Srilanka and got blessing from Subamanagala a Buddhist Monk in Colombo.¹⁰ On his return he founded Chakya Buddhist Sangham in Madras. In 1900 he embraced Buddhism and adopted the teachings of Buddha in his life Mission. Thus he was the forerunner to B.R. Ambedkar in advocating the Buddhist principles to the Scheduled Caste People.

Contributions of Ayothi Dasar

He had great influence over Col. Olcott, who worked for the welfare of Scheduled Caste people by starting five schools in Madras collectively known as Olcott Pancama Free Schools.¹¹ The first school among them was opened in June 1894 near the Theosophical Society Head-Quarters at Adyar. The Second school was established at Kodambakkam in 1898 known as H.P.B. Memorial School in remembering the deceased friend of Col. Olcott. The third in the line was named after K. Mavalankar Damodar and came into existence since second October 1899 at Tenampet. The fourth school was constructed in September 1901 at Mylapore and named Thiruvalluvar. The fifth school was opened in May 1906 in Krishnapet, four kilometres away from Adyar and named after Annie Besant.¹² These elementary schools worked well and exceed other such schools. For the establishment of these schools, Ayothi Dasar was fully responsible for inviting Miss Mary Saro and Palmer who helped Col. Olcott.¹³

In 1902 he founded South India Chakya Buddha Sangham at Royapettah and served as its Secretary. The Sangham had its branches at Paddy Field Road (Perambur), Tenampet and Egmore. For a while he spread the preaching of Buddha. Hence he was called the first Renaissance Maker of Indian Buddhism. He cultivated a good friendship with Col. Olcott. Along with him he involved in the activities of spreading Buddhist doctrines among the untouchables.¹⁴ Thus he tried to raise the self confidence of the scheduled people by telling them that they were originally Buddhist and later enslaved by the Hindu Conquerors. He thus began the neo-Buddhist Movement in Tamilnadu.

He started a weekly called Oru Paisa Tamizhan which was published on every Wednesday from Royapet since 19 June 1907. The Price of this weekly was a single paise. In this weekly he published the teachings of Buddha under the caption "Poorva Tamizholi". But the name of the weekly was changed as Tamizhan. Since 26 August 1908, Poorva Tamizholi in later was published as a book under the title 'Aiveda of Buddha' in 1912.¹⁵

Ayothi Dasar did much for the reconstruction of the culture and history of the Scheduled Caste People through a intensive research and deep study. Through his study he viewed that the Scheduled Caste people of Tamilnadu are the original inhabitants of this region and their ancestral religion was Buddhism. He also reconstructed and activated Buddhism and used Buddhism as a measurement to find out the deceptions of Brahminical Hinduism. He also believed that without constructing a counter tradition the real history and culture of the Scheduled Castes could not be revived. He also felt that the imperative need for condemning the Brahminical folly that was basically responsible for the low status of the Dalit people. He condemned Swadesi and Swaraj Movements which were built upon caste, religion, money and intellectual dominance. Through evidences he exposed the fraud of the Brahmins.¹⁶ He also blamed Swadesmitan and India which exposed the cause of the Brahmin dominance in all spheres of activities. Thus Ayothi Dasar left behind him a creative legacy of critical learning about tradition and that was put to good use by those who came after him. This legacy and counter tradition gave inspiration to the Scheduled Caste leaders and the self-respecters.¹⁷

Conclusion.

Ayothi Dasar example was followed by a group of equally eminent Scheduled Castes intellectuals like G. Appadurai, Masilamani, Madurai Pillai, Erattaimalai Srinivasan, M.C. Raja, Sivara, Swami Sahajanandam, Siva Shanmugam Pillai, Munisamy Pillai, Veeraiyan and so on. They worked untiringly for the welfare of the Scheduled Caste people and for the



Cover Page



attainment of self respect and self consciousness long before the justicites and self-respectors. Thus AyothiDasar initiated social reform and social protest movement in Tamilnadu even in the 19th century. Long before the formation of the Dravidian party, IyothiDasar by organising various Association raised voice for social justice in Tamilnadu.

Endnotes

1. Dalit Sahyitiya Academy, *Ayothiadhas Pandithar Chintanaigal*, (Tamil) Vol. I, Chennai, 1991, p. 1.
2. Thangavelu, G., *Tamilan Ayothidasa Pandithar*, (Tamil), Chennai, 1999, p. 32 – 33.
3. *Murasoli* (Tamil Daily), Madras, 19th February 1990.
4. Thirunavukkarasu, *Kalathil Nintra Kavalarkal*, (Tamil), Chennai, 1993, p. 41.
5. G.O. No. 68, Education Department, 1st January 1892, and G.O. Nos. 1010 and 1010 A Revenue Department, 30th September 1892.
6. Percival Spear, *India: A Modern History*, Anna Arbour, 1961, p. 320.
7. Kamalaannathan, T. P., *Schedule Caste's Struggle for Emancipation in South India*, Tirupathur, 1985, p. 25 – 45.
8. *Tamizhn*, 1st December 1909.
9. Nagoorkani, P., *Struggle for Social Justice in Tamil Nadu 1916 – 1939*, Madurai, 1992, p. 57.
10. Ravathy, V., *Tamilakathin Dalit Arasiyal Munnodigal* (Tamil), Pondicherry, 1997, p. 35.
11. Report on Administration of the Madras Presidency, 1906 – 1907, Madras, 1907, p. 90.
12. Kamalaannathan, T. P., *op. cit.*, pp. 18 – 19.
13. Ravathy, V., *op. cit.*, p. 36.
14. Thirunavukkarasu, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
15. Thangavelu, G., *op. cit.*, pp. 49 and 138.
16. *Dalit Manakkar Manadu*, Weekly (Tamil), Chennai, 1997, pp. 46 – 47.
17. Manikumar, K. A., *History and Society*, Tirunelveli, 1996, p. 130