

DEMAND FOR STATE AUTONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Demand for more powers for States – No problem when a single political party – Ruling at the Center and States – Distribution of powers at the States and the Centre – Earlier demand – Tamillarasu Party – RajamannerCommittee Report – Report on the Center States relations – autonomy without the right to secede.

KEYWORDS: *Federation, Autonomy, Redistribution of Powers, Strong Centre, Secession*

INTRODUCTION

Recalling the history of the evolution of the Indian Constitution of the Republic of India has become necessary at the context of the ending of one single party's ruling at the Centre and the States. During the course of time, the glamour for more and more powers will become louder and louder as the regional parties become more and more influential particularly in the election of legislators of the State and the Centre.

As the history of the making of the Indian Constitutions is, with reference to a seminar vast, I shall confine my paper to those attempts made in Tamil Nadu. Ever since independence from the British rule became the objective of the struggle;, attempts were made to determine what type of government British India should have, whether there should be a federation of the States or not; what should be their powers etc ... The resolutions passed at the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress party, Home Rule League established by Annie Besant, Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms - to name a few of the attempts made in the direction. The Indian Home Rule movement is believed to have set the stage for Independent movement under the leadership of Annie Besant. Montagu–Chelmsford report prepared in 1918 formed the basis of the Government of India Act 1919 relating to constitutional reforms. The demand for a separate state Sovereign State for Muslims in the thirties and forties is said to be a result of the dispute regarding the sharing of the powers which ended in the creation of Pakistan. This changed the political scenario strengthening the hands who demanded strong Central government preventing further vivisection of the country as seen in the debates that took place in the Constitution Assembly “The Drafting Committee prepared a Draft Constitution. The general debate on the Draft Constitution began on 4th November and lasted up to 9th November 1948. The clause by clause consideration of the Draft Constitution commenced on 15th November 1948. One hundred and fourteen days were spent on the consideration of the Draft Constitution.¹

The first draft of the Constitution contained 395 articles and 8 Schedules. On 26 day of November, 1949 the Constituent Assembly adapted, enacted and gave to ourselves the Constitution of India.²

Part XI of the Indian Constitution deals with relations between the Union and the States. Chapter I Legislative Relations contains Articles 245 to 255; Chapter II Administrative Relations Articles 256 to 263. In the 7th schedule there are three lists viz List 1. Union List 2. State List 3. Concurrent List. The subjects on which Union Government and States governments make laws are enumerated in Articles 229 to 239.³ It is obvious a cursory reading of the Articles 352, 356, 360, 361 that deal with the Emergency Provisions, Articles 369 with temporary power Parliament make laws with respect to certain matter in the State list as if they were matters in the Concurrent List will reveal the Indian constitution is though apparently federal but unitary both in letter and spirit.⁴

So long both at the Centre and the States ruled by the single party namely the Congress Party, there was no deliberate demand for more powers from the States. After the reorganization of the States on linguistic basis virtually there was no demand at all. The only State where the demand was not for more powers, but separation from the Indian Union and creation of sovereign Dravidanadu comprising Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra as the peoples of the States speak Dravidian languages. That is they belong to one race-Dravidian but speak different languages of one group. This demand was not a new one as it was even during the British rule. The Dravidian movement was only in Tamil Nadu but it went on demanding separation in spite of the fact that the other States never heeded to the call. The movement was popular in Tamil Nadu not because of its political agenda but for its social philosophy. It is said even the leaders of the movement never genuinely believed but, went on harping for Dravidanadu. In 1962 India was unexpectedly attacked by China which considered being a steadfast friend by Nehru who was the then Prime Minister. Heartbroken by the Chinese perfidy Nehru died. At the time C. N. Annadurai leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam gave up Dravidanadu but declared the party should fight for State autonomy. It was being said that the Congress party that was ruling both at the Centre and the States was contemplating to ban any organization demanding separation from the Union and put all the supporters and sympathizers behind the bars. In 1967 DMK captured the power in Tamil Nadu. So much happened to change the political scenario in India. The popularity of the Dravidian movement was not for its political agenda for separation but for its championing of Tamil language and culture, for its social philosophy such as anti-Bhraminisam, abolition of castes. It is a separate subject for research. Anyhow their political demand for separation was bitterly attacked by Maa. Po. since 1944. I have presented a research paper titled "Stronger Tamil Identity, Stronger India – An Autobiographical Study".⁵ Where in the political genius of a comparatively little known figure has been analyzed. He who founded a political party named Tamil arasu Katchi – a literally translation is 'Autonomous Tamil State' and whose inaugural meeting was attended by the contemporary Tamil intellectuals. He declared: 'The name of my race is Tamilian', 'My country is Tamil Nadu', 'My demand is Autonomy', 'My aim is the establishment of socialistic society', 'My international policy is fraternity among all nations'⁶

He became popular because of his brilliant oratory speeches. He conducted conferences reminding the Tamil people of their glorious heritage. Particularly the conferences on Silappadikaram and Thirukkural are worthy of mention. In short Maa. Po. meant Tamil autonomy within India, without succession from India. The Centre, he declared, should only have Foreign policy, Defence, Communications, Customs and the rest will be with States. Bitterly attacked Dravidian movement and he championed the cause of Tamil culture, Tamil language and literature. But compared to Dravidian party he was not popular among the people as he was considered an appendage of the Congress party. Remaining within the

Congress party, he spoke for State autonomy which was anathema to the then Congress party. Despite the fact that he participated in the independent struggle and courted imprisonment and a staunch Gandhian. For his advocacy of autonomy policy, reorganization of States on linguistic basis and other causes which the subsequent history proved them perfectly right, was expelled from the Congress party. The irony the political causes for which he was known as a bitter critic of the Dravidian policy of succession; he had to stand and won the election on the electoral symbol and the support of the DMK. But at that time DMK gave up its demand for Dravidanadu.

In short, Tamil state autonomy and the Maa. Po. I became synonymous. His book 'Clarion call for State autonomy' contains all those articles he wrote right from 1944, demanding State autonomy for Tamil Nadu and other States.⁷ A book of less than one hundred pages deserves to be translated into other languages.

Excerpts of his thought on autonomy for Tamil Nadu are given below taken from his meeting with Vinoba Bhava.

'The shortcoming in our constitutional law'

The States constituting our republic don't have separate citizenship act, army, and flag of its own. Despite the fact they are called 'States' as if they were sovereign and independent. Most probably they were called states because of the hope that in due course of time many powers of the Union would be transferred to the States as it was newly created. But the fact is though their called States they don't have powers as the nomenclature implies.

'There are two ways to make Indian Constitution truly federal. One is the powers that are concentrated at Union should be transferred to States during the time of Nehru ruling. The second one is where the States ruled by non-congress parties should demand for autonomy in a democratic way. "It is utter foolishness by weakening the States and making them submissive with concentration powers of Centre".'

"For me, the State autonomy is a political issue. Here there is no Dravidian –Aryan conflict, no North and South Conflict. To convert this political issue into racial problem, regional struggle tantamount to an act against the unity of India.

"Parties Responsibility"

"State autonomy is not for Tamil Nadu only. It is not an exclusive issue for Tamil Nadu only. It is the issue of every State. There would be an awakening among the toiling masses when the government is run in the language of the people of the State. At that time of awakening, those religious and racial conflicts would despair. Then the people struggle should be based on social, political and economic causes. In that context, every Indian state should start to behave as independent unit within the Indian Republic. That time is not far off. As a matter of fact, the time has come. It would be enough if the people themselves realized or the political parties make them realize."⁸

Excerpts from the interview that took place in 1956 between Maa. Po. Si and Vinoba Bhava.

Vinoba Bhava: What are the political objectives of your party Tamilaru Katchi.

Maa. Po. Si: Tamil Nadu should be an autonomous unit within the Indian Union.

Vinoba Bhava: If it so do you mean to say that Tamil Nadu state should have right to secede from India.

Maa. Po. Si: My party opposes that type of arrangement that is succession from India. But my Party insists and

means autonomy more powers should be given to States. We mean by autonomy more powers to the States. I also advocate that the powers of the Unions should be reduced.

Vinoba Bhave: What are the powers according to you should be given to the union.

Maa. Po. Si: Foreign policy, Communications, Defense, Customs. These alone should be the Union Economic planning may be with the Union. If it is so there will be no North versus South talk.

Vinoba Bhave: Don't do you think the State should look after the growth of language and culture.

Maa. Po. Si: The growth of Tamil language does not depend on writing commentaries on Thirukkural and Kambaramayanam. In the administration, in the legislative

Assembly, in the court, the language of the people i.e. Tamil should be used. And then only people can understand.

Vinoba Bhave: You say that the government does not evince interest or take steps in this matter.

Maa. Po. Si: No, The fact is those who claim who are in power that their mother tongue is

Tamil wish to run the administration in English. So that a movement has become a desideratum. In the matter of the promotion of the culture, this State has been in different. For example, I would like to say what has happened. So far the poets

honored by the Post and Telegraphs by the issue of the stamps of them – not even a single poet from this place finds in its honor.

Patel: Is it really?

Maa. Po. Si: Yes.

Vinoba Bhave: This matter should have been brought to the notice of the Centre.

Maa. Po. Si: I tried my best to convince the Postal authorities but failed. After having protracted correspondence the Postal Authorities I got a reply 'noting could be done' from them.⁹

Next attempt. Raja Manners Report of the Center State Relationship Inquire Committee is an important document in state autonomy literature. In the tribute paid by P. V. Rajamanner to Karunanithi the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu who set up the expert committee. P. V. Raja manner has said 'it is a signal contribution to the ushering in of real and everlasting federal set up in this great country of ours will no doubt be a landmark in its history'.¹⁰

The other members of the Committee were Dr. A. L. Mudaliar and P. Chandra Reddy. Their "recommendation was in favor of the autonomy of the States, autonomy consistent with the integrity of the country". This was exactly what Mo. po. si said in 1944 i.e. a quarter of the century back. How Mo. Po. Si vision was which Tamil Nadu blissfully ignored. Of course, the Committee got the views from eminent public men and jurists including MP Sivagana Gramini. Of the terms of the committee is requested to examine the existing provisions of the Constitution and to suggest the measures necessary for augmenting the resources of the State and for securing the utmost autonomy of the State in the executive, legislative and judicial branches including the High Court, without prejudice to the integrity of the country as a whole.¹¹

The report is divided into XXI chapters with nine appendices. The report is also academic, incorporating Constitution Assembly debates pertaining to the distribution of powers between the Union and the States. The chapter XXI ‘Summary of recommendations’ contained the committee’s recommendations for the grant of more powers to the states. The chapter should be read along with the questionnaire. Both of them are much of practical value as they are a vital portion of the Report. This should be quoted in full but this cannot be done in a seminar like this owing to the time restriction. With this question I would like to end my paper: the question is; It is well known that Mo. Po. Si was synonymous with State autonomy and his thought on this matter was far ahead of his time. Why he was not included in the Rajamannar committee where all members of the committee were not well known in Tamil Nadu? No State in India the demand for State autonomy has been made. Only in Tamil Nadu, the demand has been made: a Committee constituted by the government that produced the report whose recommendations are worthy of consideration.

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