

**RETTAIMALAI SRINIVASAN AND ADI-DRAVIDA
MAHAJANA SABHA**

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Absract

Adi–DravidaMahajana Sabha was a great institutions. Adi DravidaMahajana Sabha and Paraiyan, the newspaper that shaped and moulded Rettaimalai Srinivasan and propagated his life and mission throughout the country, amongst his people and wide opened the eyes of the government and hearts of the public. Rettaimalai Srinivasan was born on July 7th 1859 at Kozhiyalam village, Chengalput District to an ordinary labourer named Rettaimalai. In 1887 at the age of 28, he got married Aranganayaki and he had six children. His wife was mainly responsible for his services to his fellowmen. He lost his wife in 1928 when she was 31 years old. The aim and object of his life was to uplift the downtrodden community. In order to high light the grievances of his community he started “Paraiyan

Mahajana Sabha” in 1891 and it had branches all over Tamil Nadu. Furthermore in 1893 he started a weekly magazine called “Paraiyan”. His majestic government honoured him with the awards of Rao Sahib in 1926 and Rao Bhadur in 1930 and DiwanBahadur in 1936. The sabha spearheaded for the political rights of the depressed classes and gained entry into legislative Bodies. In 1929 ‘The Madras Adi-Dravida MahajanaSabha’ was renamed as “All India Adi Dravidar Mahajana Sabha” and registered.

Key words: Paraiyan,RaoBhadur,DiwanBahadur,Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha

Introduction

Adi –dravida Mahajana sabha was a great institutions. Adi dravida Mahajana sabha and Paraiyan, the newspaper that shaped and moulded Rettaimalai Srinivasan and propagated his life and mission throughout the country, amongst his people and wide opened the eyes of the government and hearts of the public. Caste has been the peculiar phenomena that dominated the Hindu society and contributed to its social hierarchy which was a class by itself. One of the earliest works in Tamil literature Tolkappiyam not speaks of the four folds caste systems chaturvarna in the Tamil terminology as the Anthanar(Brahmin), Arasar(King), Vellalar (Cultivators), and Vanigar (Merchants). But it is quite different from Aryan classification of society intoBrahmanan(Priest) Kshatriya (Warriors) Vaisya (Traders) and Shudra (Labourer).

Adi Dravidar Mahajana Sabha

Rettaimalai Srinivasan was born on July 7th 1859 at Kozhiyalam village, Chengalput District to an ordinary labourer named Rettaimalai. In 1887 at the age of 28, he got married Aranganayaki and he had six children. His wife was mainly responsible for his services to his fellowmen. He lost his wife in 1928 when she was 31 years old. The aim and object of his life was to uplift the downtrodden community. When the caste based organisations began to appear towards the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century for improving the conditions and status of their own castes, the depressed class leaders also started forming an association to speak for their community and to demand for special treatments from the Government. The depressed classes, particularly the Adi-Dravidas of Tamilnadu had their own association

known as 'Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha' which was started in 1857. This sabha was the earliest socio political association of the scheduled castes. In 1857, some learned scholars, businessmen and social workers belonging to adidravida community had formed this association. But it was registered only in December, 1892 under the society's registration act of 1860 as the Madras Adi Dravidar Mahajana Sabha. Hence its origin could be traced out from 1892 and its operation was done by democratically constitute methods. As regards the membership any person who was above 18 years of age could become member irrespective of sex by paying four annas (25 paise) as annual subscription with the formal approval of the executive committee might be elected by the members of the General body. The duty of the executive committee was monitor the implementation, of the resolution passed in the conferences, rightly implemented and forwarded it to Government for necessary follow up action. Afterwards hundreds of branches have emerged throughout madras presidency.

This sabha maintained a 'service army' and government wing for the orderly conducting of conferences, deputations etc. the service army mainly consisted of youngsters and their main duties were to safeguards the rights and liberties of the depressed classes and organize and conduct demonstrations. A galaxy of leaders like M.C.Rajah, Rettaimalai Srinivasan, R. Veerian, J. Sivashunmugampillai and others were the office bearers of the sabha and they served tirelessly and fearlessly for the upliftment of the depressed classes. It was a popular and powerful organisations which served as the custodian of the rights and libertieis of the depressed classes. The permanent organ of the sabha was the executive committee but the day to day work was carried on by the secretaries, Treasurer and the general secretary.

The objectives of the sabha

1. To maintain and sub-sidies journals
2. To public books and pamphlets on political, scientific, economic and Literary subjects.
3. To organise and hold public meetings
4. And to start and maintain libraries, free reading rooms, night schools and cultural meetings.

The most important motive for starting this association was to educate the depressed class peoples and to organise them and to agitate for their demands. Under the auspices of these sabha periodical conference were held in madras city as well as in the districts. These conferences were presided over by distinguished personalities who worked for the upliftment of the depressed classes. At the various conference of Adi Dravidar Mahajana Sabha strong resolution had been passed and submitted to the Government. It also had made frequent representations too government through memorandums, for the redressal of their grievances. They have pleaded to protect their political rights, economic freedom, educational oppurtunities and social condition.

The sabha spearheaded for the political rights of the depressed classes and gained entry into legislative Bodies. On August 20, 1917 when the secretary of state for India and the Viceroy paid a visit madras, the sabha had deputed its members to explain their position for making its representation to the legislative bodies. In 1918, the sabha had submitted its memorandum to the Indian constitutional reform committee. The governor's council members were the officials affiliated to the British crown. The sabha opposed the transfer of political power to Indians as it would once again result in suppression of the depressed classes by the high caste hindus. In later days the sabha opposed the principle of nomination and demanded that the mode of election from depressed classes by reservation to their seats in the legislatures. Further, in the name of the sabha Rettaimalai Srinivasan urged the Governor of Madras that if all the principle of nominations hold s good the Governor should follow the letter in spirit of the 'Instrument of Instruction' issued by his gracious majesty the king emperor of India be pleased to reserve the portfolio of nominations in his own hands and nominated representative of our community of the legislature in consultation with the recognised political association of the community, the Madras Adi-Dravidar Mahajana Sabha.

Further, it was stated that the sabha was the King-maker ever since the Montague-Chelmsford visit helped in securing representation for the depressed classes and had been consulted on such question as the constitutional reforms including Franchise and Functions Rowlett bills. The sabha in the same Memorandum had expressed that proper communal

representation should be given to the depressed classes in the legislatures. The total depressed class population of the madras presidency was 75,03,475 but they were given only five seats in the local legislatures. The Mohamadians in the presidency were given thirteen seats, Indian Christians were given five seats and the Anglo Indian were given two seats. Therefore, they resorted to agitate for the removal of this sort of inequality and injustice. The stigma of untouchability had reverted the depressed classes to the age old oppression in pre-British days that was resulted in their present position and which disqualified them from exercising their franchise under the reform act of 1919. Thus the social, economic and educational depression of the community borne out of the stigma of untouchability made them unfit for franchisement. The sabha, thus demanded not less than 20 seats in the legislature.

Practically under the Justice party Government there was no justice to the depressed classes. The caste-blocks in the council obstructed the depressed classes in their efforts for amelioration. They wanted that any legislation that was brought forth in the council that affected the social and labour problems of the depressed classes. Finally the sabha had appealed to the government that a qualified depressed class person should be appointed as a member in the Governor council as in the case of Mohammedans. And also made special request to establish a separate department under the direct control of the governor to monitor the progress of the depressed classes. It was stated, that they were only nominated members and therefore not eligible to become ministers. So they wanted to be elected and elevated as minister.

On 16th May, 1926, the 10th Conference of the madras presidency Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held under the presidenship of R. Veeriyar, M.L.C. at the Gokhale Hall, Madras and it had urged the Governor of Madras, “to appoint a commission to investigate into the conditions and to suggested measures for the amelioration of the depressed classes” and also to form a “separate electorate for the depressed classes”. The conference also wanted enfranchisement to all persons of the depressed classes who have passed S.S.L.C and also the smallest possible tax to a corporation. Another resolution was passed at the conferences that a representation of depressed classes is must be therein the cabinet minister. Again the 11th conferences of the madras presidency Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha was held under the

presidenship of Rao Sahib L.C. Gurusamy M.L.C on 8th January 1928 at Gokale Hall Madras. It urged that the government should make elementary education compulsory and to introduce vocational training in all the elementary schools. It also emphasised that the depressed classes must be represented to cabinet and also requested the government to look into the working conditions of the tannery workers. It also requested that the enhancement of scholarship amounts paid to the pupils belong to the depressed classes should be raised. In 1929 'The Madras Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha' was renamed as "All India Adi Dravidar Mahajana Sabha" and registered.

All India Dravidar Mahajan Sabha held its conference on 24th February 1929 under the presidenship of B.C. Mandal. The conference had made a request to the Government of India regarding the selection of a person from the depressed classes as one of the members of Indian labour representing to International labour organisation at its conferences. The conferences had forcibly demanded the statutory safeguards and suitable berths in Governors as well as viceroys council for the depressed classes. The conferences further appealed to the Government of India to constitute a "Committee of Enquiry" to enquiry into the socio-economic backwardness of 50million depressed classes in the country. Thus the Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha formed by the Adi Dravidas of Tamilnadu had been raised to the all India level and been instrumental for the unification of all the 50 million depressed classes under one banner "The All India Depressed Classes Association". In 1920 there were only one depressed classes member in the madras legislature council. By the constant and continuous efforts made by the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha the council was represented by its members with increased strength. In the year 1925 itself, it had demanded 20 seats in the madras legislative council and 2 seats in the Indian Legislature. The number of depressed class members who were nominated to the madras legislature had been increasing as follow in 1920 it was one, in 1923 none, in 1926 ten, in 1928 eleven, in 1931 sixteen, and in 1946 thirty in the madras legislative assembly. Sincere attempts of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha and its achievements. In 1928-29 it was found that the depressed class members were represented in almost all the local bodies.

Conclusion

In almost all its conferences the Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha had been demanding the election of depressed classes and not to be nominated. It also demanded that a 'separate electorate' was given. It was customary for the Government to seek the advice of the executive councillors to nominate members of the depressed classes to the legislative council. But the leaders of the Adi-Dravida Mahajan Sabha apprehended that the nominated member was prone to follow the lead of those who nominated him. They pointed out that this defect was prevailing even in the joint parliamentary committee. Therefore, the sabhathorugh to suggest that a member might be selected from the panel it could submit to the governor to protect the interest of the Adi-Dravidas. The sabha demanded the introduction of 'Separate Electorates' as rights of the depressed classes. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan have re-opened the question of separate electorate for the depressed classes in the Round table conference. As result, on 26th September,1932 the Poona Pact was made and the hard earned 'separate electorate' was deprived to the depressed classes. Instead they we able to get reserved seats in the General-electorates.

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