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ANTI-HINDI AGITATION IN TAMILNADU – AN ESTIMATE

R.Rajasekar

The implementation of Hindi as a compulsory language in Tamilnadu by Rajaji, during August 1937 had both acceptance¹ and opposition². There was opposition even at the time of inception. A procession was conducted to oppose Hindi on 29 August 1937 at Thiruvayyaru on behalf of the Senthamil Academy of that place. The Self Respect Movement conference held at Duraiyur on 27 August 1937 and the Tamil conference held at Trichy on 26 December 1937 also criticized the imposition of Hindi in Tamilnadu. On 27 February 1938 at Kanchipuram a conference was convened specifically to oppose Hindi³. On 21 April 1938, when Hindi was introduced compulsory in 60 schools in May 1938 S.Jegadeesan undertook fasting against the Hindi for the first time. On 3 June 1938 an agitation was arranged in front of the house of Chief Minister Rajaji and the agitators, D. Nayagam and Shanmuganatha Adigal were arrested for the first time⁴ on 14 November 1938. R.Dharmambal, Muvalur Ramamirtham Ammayar and others were arrested for their agitation in front of the Hindu Theosophical School, Sowcarpet⁵. Natarajan and Thalamuthu dedicated their lives for the cause of opposing Hindi on 15 January 1939 and 12 March 1939 respectively.⁶ On 5 December 1938 and on 10 June 1938, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy and C.N.Annadurai were arrested and released after imprisonment. On 10 February 1940 E.V.Ramasamy offered the final ultimatum to give up the imposition of Hindi. So on 28 February 1940 the government withdrew the

compulsory implementation of Hindi by a government order.⁷ Thus from 1937 to 1947 the opposition to Hindi was a solid and stern one. Though language is for communication in the Tamil country, known for Dravidian languages, Hindi was opposed because it was implemented as a compulsory course of study in the school curriculum.⁸

At the drawn of Indian independence in Tamilnadu there were three sets of people with regard to India. The first one was the people who had no problems of language. The second set of people had the knowledge of Hindi. The third set of people showed their aversion of Hindi, who opposed it and unhesitatingly agitated even to avoid the entry of Hindi into the Tamil country in any form. While E.V.Ramasamy opposed the proposal of making Hindi as National and Official language, P.Ramasamy Reiddiar's Congress ministry of Madras state made Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools. As an impact on 17 May 1948 to oppose the views of the Congress ministry a meeting was arranged at St.Mary's Hall and C.N.Annadurai led the Anti-Hindi agitation.⁹ Subsequently on 1 August 1948 the Dravida Kazhaham concentrated to prepare plan for Hindi agitation.¹⁰ So from 10 August 1948 to 1 September 1948 the anti-Hindi agitation volunteers revealed their opposition by wearing black shirts and carrying black flags.¹¹ On 2 May 1950 when order was passed to make Hindi as a compulsory subject in the high schools of Tamilnadu the anti-Hindi agitation

gained momentum. As per the resolution of the Executive Committee meeting of D.M.K. held in Madras on 26 July 1952, Hindi letters were erased in the Boards kept in the Railway junctions. Hindi names were erased nearly in 600 Railway Stations.¹² This novel venture of opposition was continued further in a democratic way by E.V.Ramasamy from 8 August 1954.¹³ Rajaji countered the anti-Hindi agitation with the use of police power. Two persons lost their lives and many were wounded. This act on the part of the government, encouraged the agitators to oppose Hindi with redoubled vigour. This even led to the resignation of Rajaji. When K.Kamaraj succeeded Rajaji as Chief Minister, he dropped not only the "Race Based Educational Pattern" (*Kula Kalvi Thittam*) of Rajaji but also avoided the agitation announced by Periyar on 1 August 1955. On 30 July 1955 itself K.Kamaraj gave an assurance that Hindi will not be introduced against the will of the Tamils. Further he solved the issue by saying that the names of the places will be written in the name Boards of Railway Stations in three languages in the order of Tamil, Hindi and English. Convinced by the statement of K.Kamaraj, E.V.Ramasamy gave up his idea of burning the National flag as announced by him.¹⁴

The Official Language Commission appointed by the central government under P.G.Kher was opposed. Further E.V.Ramasamy insisted on announcing Tamil as the Official language in Madras along with the use of Tamil during the rituals in the temples. So on 27 December 1956 Tamil was announced as the official language in Tamilnadu.¹⁵ So it is evident that by this move Hindi lost its place in Tamilnadu and the position and reputation of Tamil was maintained intact. In the D.M.K. Conference held at Poonamallee during September 1959 an attempt was endeavoured to revive Hindi agitation. But Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's announcement in the Parliament that Hindi will not be forced on non-Hindi speaking people calmed down the situation. But on 7 October 1960 the President's ordinance informed that Hindi will be made as the official language of India in

1965. The D.M.K. in its meeting of the General Council held at Kumarapalayam 18, 19 June 1960 expressed its opposition to the agitation of Hindi.¹⁶ On 1 August 1960 C.N. Annadurai at the party meeting held at Kodambakkam informed that compulsory imposition of Hindi will be opposed on any ground. When the Official Language Bill was passed in the Indian Parliament in 1963, C.N. Annadurai expressed his dissatisfaction and sentimental objection to the Official Language Bill.¹⁷ On 25 August 1963 in the Hindi Protest Conference arranged at Thanjavur C.N. Annadurai opposed the compulsory thrust of Hindi and informed that it would cause a war. On 6 October 1963 at Trichy another Anti Hindi Conference was convened. The agitation continued on 13 October 1963 in Madras and the Anti Hindi Conference was conducted. After the demise of Nehru in May 1964, when Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister of India he issued a circular on 5 December 1964 to the effect that Hindi will become the official language of India from 26 January 1965 onwards. This was a diplomatic attempt to replace English by Hindi. So the Central and State governments had to switch over to Hindi.¹⁸ This added fuel to the fire. On 8 January 1965 the Executive Committee of DMK treated the ensuing Republic Day as the day of mourning to express the anti Hindi feelings of the Tamils. It was also decided to wear black shirts and black badges and to arrange for public meetings to condemn the imposition of Hindi.¹⁹ The Tamilnadu Anti-Hindi Conference arranged at Trichy on 17 January 1965 too vehemently opposed the making of Hindi as the official language of India. English was treated as a window through which one could peep into the world.²⁰ Further it was clearly mentioned that the arrival of Hindi as the official language would make the citizens of the non-Hindi speaking states as second rate citizens. So it was insisted that the Central Government should retrace its attempts regarding official languages.²¹

When the agitating leaders of DMK were arrested on 25 January 1965 clashes emerged. The D.M.K. sympathisers committed suicide by calling his action as a sacrifice at the

altar of Tamil. Subsequently before 12 February 1965 four of the members burnt themselves to death.²² Thus with the main stream the students too confined to anti-Hindi agitation in Tamilnadu. The students, on 25 January 1965 at Madurai went on procession. Anti-Hindi demonstrations held at different places. They distributed pamphlets and stuck posters in the walls to gain the sympathy of the public.²³ It was continued in Madras, Trichy, Coimbatore, Madurai, Chidambaram and other places. At Annamalai University in the encounter between the police and students, three students were injured and one student by name Rajendran died in gun shot. The Salem Polytechnic students too participated in it.²⁴ The school students also associated themselves with the anti-Hindi agitation. They stopped the trains in many places and tied black flags in them.²⁵ The students shouted the slogans such as "Hindi Never / English Ever", "Down with Hindi" etc. The Government in turn arrested 921 persons on 28 January 1965.²⁶ The Madras State Anti-

Hindi Agitation Council formed on 1 February 1965, met on 8 February at Madras Law College led the students to violence and two Sub-Inspectors were burned alive. So the police resorted to firing and 28 students lost their lives.²⁷ Finally the two language formula by C.N. Annadurai, with the approval of the students caused the termination of the Hindi Agitation in Tamilnadu. The Anti-Hindi Agitation spearheaded by the Dravidian parties and Tamil scholars was a notable event in the socio-cultural history of Tamilnadu. The Congress Governments at the Centre and State of Tamilnadu by dealing with the language issue without any farsighted ideas widened the problems for the removal of peace and security. These occurrences routed the Congress in the Madras State in the election held in 1967. The Language Amendment Act enunciated on 8 January 1968 put an end totally to the agitations of such nature in the succeeding ages.

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