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Thol.Thirumavalavan - A Champion for Dalits in Tamilnadu

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should at creating awareness through education. Government and NGO's both should try out to improve the social and economic condition /status of women's through social welfare and poverty alleviation programmes. Non- governmental Organizations which operate at the grass roots level are in the position to promote the kind of attitudinal

change by encouraging community discussion about the benefits which might accrue if all of its human resources were developed. NGO's should take a key role in educating the public on this matter by taking the regular assessment of indicators of status of women in society, such as sex ratio, and female mortality, literacy, and economic participation.¹²

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THOL.THIRUMAVALAVAN - A CHAMPION FOR DALITS IN TAMILNADU

Dr. G.M. Sunder Singh

Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi is a Dravidian political party in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Thol. Thirumavalavan. The motto of the party is the uprising of Dalits in Tamil Nadu. Thol. Thirumavalavan was born on 17 August 1962, as the second child of Tholkappian (Ramasamy) and Periyammal, in the village of Anganur in Ariyalur District of Tamil Nadu. His father had studied up to the grade, while his mother remained uneducated. He had a sister and three brothers. He was the only member of his family who went on to higher education after completion of his schooling. He initially studied B.Sc Chemistry, and went to do a master degree in Criminology, before studying law at Law College Madras. He then began working in the government's Forensic Department as a scientific assistant. He began growing interested in politics in 1982, when he was still a student, in reaction to reports from refugees of Sri Lankan military atrocities against Tamils in Sri Lanka. He began holding rallies and organised boycotts and conferences to support the Sri Lankan cause around Madras Law College. Till 2002, he had his name as R. Thirumavalavan, with his father's

name Ramaswamy as initial. He changed it to Thol. Thirumavalavan, "Thol" indicating the shorter version of Tholkappian.

In 1988, while working in the government's Forensic Department in the southern city of Madurai, he met Malaichamy, the Tamil Nadu state convenor of the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), an organisation that fought for the rights of Dalits. The next year, following Malaichamy's death, Thirumavalavan was elected as the leader of the DPI. He designed a new flag for the organisation in 1990. As part of his work, he also began visiting Dalit villages in the Madurai region, and began learning about the problems faced by Dalits. The killing of two Dalits in 1992 made him more militant. Against the background of increasing Dalit assertiveness, he emerged as one of the major Dalit leaders in Tamil Nadu, with a large base of support in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. During 1997, he was suspended from his government job on account of his increased political activity. He resigned from his job formally in August 1999 to contest in the 1999 Indian general elections.

He contested the 1999 and 2004 general elections unsuccessfully and won the 2009 general elections from the Chidambaram constituency. He won the 2001 State assembly elections in alliance with Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), and he resigned in 2004 quoting ideological differences with DMK. His confrontation with Pattali Makkal Katchi and its leader Ramadoss has resulted in frequent clashes. Both parties accuse each other of instigating violence against the other community. Both Thirumavalavan and Ramadoss reconciled and worked together during the period of 2004 to 2009, when they were part of the same electoral alliance.

The DPI boycotted until 1999 general elections. It is unclear on why the party did not contest elections till 1999. The decision of contesting election in 1999 was considered controversial within the party. Thirumavalavan allied with G. K. Moopanar's Tamil Maanila Congress and represented the Third Front. The party contested in the Parliamentary constituencies of Chidambaram and Perambalur. Thirumavalavan contested in Chidambaram, and managed to poll 2.25 lakh votes in the elections. The phase also culminated the rivalry between Thirumavalavan's party and his competitors in the Chidambaram Constituency. PMK is a political party that has a strong presence in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. The election in the constituency was marked by violence from both the parties. In 2001 state elections Viduthalai Chiruthaigal allied with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and contested in seven seats. Since the PMK joined the AIADMK alliance, the VCK had to join the DMK led alliance. There were ideological differences in the alliance as it had BJP, which was earlier criticized by Thirumavalavan. Thirumavalavan was elected from Mangalore Constituency to State Legislative Assembly. During the 2004 general elections, he resigned his MLA post on 3 February 2004 quoting humiliation meted out by the alliance partners, especially the DMK. He also quoted that he quit as he contested in the symbol of DMK during the 2001 assembly elections. Thirumavalavan contested once again from Chidambaram in 2004 general elections, this time with Janata Dal (United) and polled 2.57 lakh votes and lost by a low margin. During 2004, after efforts from N. Sethuraman

from Muventhar Munnetra Kazhagam, Thirumavalavan and Ramadoss, the leader of PMK joined hands through a Tamil protection movement named Tamil Paathukappu Iyakkam. He joined the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) alliance in the 2006 elections to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. His party was recognized by the Election Commission of India as a registered political party on 2 March 2006. Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi contested in nine seats in Tamil Nadu and 2 seats in Pondicherry. The party won two of them, namely Durai Ravikumar from Kattumannarkoil, and Selvaperunthagai from Mangalore constituency. The alliance with ADMK broke in 2006, when he started allying with the DMK. His party contested in the local bodies elections in DMK alliance in 2006 and won five chairmen to various municipalities. In the 2009 general election, Thirumavalavan allied with DMK and was elected to Parliament from the Chidambaram Lok Sabha constituency in his third attempt. In 2001 he was elected to Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly for the first time. In May 2009 he was Elected to Lok Sabha (fifteenth) for the first time. On 31 August 2009 he was appointed as the Member of committee on commerce and member of consultative committee on ministry of social justice and empowerment.

Thirumavalavan is a Member of Parliament in 15th Lok Sabha and the current President of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (Liberation Panthers Party), a Dalit political party in the state of Tamil Nadu. He rose to prominence in the 1990s as a Dalit leader, and entered politics in 1999. He has also expressed support for Tamil nationalist movements and groups elsewhere, including Sri Lanka. Thirumavalavan's views on the importance of the Tamil identity have also led him to strongly support Tamil secessionist groups in Sri Lanka, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a militant secessionist group which is banned as a terrorist organisation in India. He has criticised India for assisting the Sri Lankan army during the Sri Lankan military operations against the LTTE in 2008 and 2009, and has called upon the government of Tamil Nadu to take steps to safeguard the Tamils of Sri Lanka. On 15 January 2009 he started a hunger fast near Chennai (Maraimalai Adigal Nagar) for the

cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. After four days, on 19 January he called off the fast, saying that it had had no effect on the Indian government, and calling for a hartal in its place. He was a part of the 10 member MP team that visited the war affected areas and transitional centres in Vavuniya on 11 October 2009. The delegation visited various part of Jaffna district and had a meeting at the Jaffna public library.

Thiruma's has written many books in Tamil include *Aththumeeru* (Transgress), *Tamizhargal Hindukkala?* (Are the Tamils, Hindus?), *Eelam Ennal Puligal, Puligal Ennal Eelam* (Eelam means Tigers, Tigers means Eelam), *Hindutuvathai Verarupom* (We Shall Uproot Hindutva), *Saadhiya Sandharpavaadha Aniyai Veezhtuvom* (We Shall Defeat the Casteist Opportunist Alliance). Two of his books have been published in English by Stree-Samya Books, Kolkata: *Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation* (political essays written for 34 weeks in the *India Today* magazine's Tamil edition) and *Uproot Hindutva: The Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panthers* (contains 12 of his speeches). Thirumavalavan acted in several films and had a guest appearance as a Tamil militant leader in Sri Lanka in his first film *Anbu Thozhi* (Lady Love), directed by L. G. Ravichandran. Thirumavalavan has since been cast in the leading role of a film titled *Kalaham* (Mutiny). He plays the character of Balasingham, a law college professor, which is being directed by Mu Kalanchiyam. This will be his second film. He also made a cameo appearance in Mansoor Ali Khan's *Ennai Paar Yogam Varum*.

During 1999 general elections, there was intense violence in the region with casualties in both sides. Thirumavalavan accused *Pattali Makkal Katchi*, and its founder Ramadoss of instigating violence among the

Vanniyars that result in the attack of Dalits. While Ramadoss alleges that Thirumavalavan encourages his party men to have sham inter-caste love marriage, Thirumavalavan accuses Ramadoss of showing caste superiority and instigating violence against Dalits. Both Thirumavalavan and Ramadoss reconciled and worked together during the period of 2004 to 2009, when they were part of the same electoral alliance. After 2009, when PMK split out of the DMK combine, the mutual confrontation started again. In December 2012, Ramadoss formed an all community safeguard forum comprising 51 intermediate castes. He said he would not have any further alliance with Thirumavalavan and his party. He alleged that the Dalits take undue advantage over other communities using the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and the Act should be abolished. During April 2013, after the party conference of PMK in Mahabalipuram, there were widespread attacks on the Dalits in Dharmapuri district that resulted in two Dalits being killed. Both PMK and VCK accused each other for the mishap, but Ramadoss was arrested after the orders from the state government for the Thirumavalavan accused Ramadoss that his loss in the electoral base after the 2009 general elections and 2011 assembly elections has resulted in his going back to instigating caste violence. The VCK, in a plan to start a television channel, asked the party men to donate gold on the occasion of the 50th birthday of Thirumavalavan. There were also *Thulabaram* types of functions where equal weight of Thirumavalavan was donated. Thirumavalavan clarified that the idea was to collect donations for the party and that his party did not enjoy support from rich people as with the case of other parties. Thus Thol. Thirumavalavan was a champion who rendered his support for the uprising of Dalits in Tamilnadu

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ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU, 1952 -2011

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By law and practice women comprise a special category in Indian elections.¹ Elections are considered to be an integral part of the democratic system. Elections are taken as an institutional democratic procedure through which Governments are formed and controlled. People participate in elections as voters and contestants. Women as the equal count in population with men, possessing equal political rights at par with men, though participate actively as voters their participation as contestants in elections is not at par either with their population count or with men. *The following urge the need of women in active political participation as contestants in elections:* The Indian councils Act of 1861 was a landmark in the growth and development of the legislatures. The movement for independence also raised the question of the women's suffrage. With this act there was a gradual expansion of the inclusion of Indians in local governance. Women's movement for political rights began in 1917. The establishment of Women's India Association (WIA) on 8th May 1917 was the first attempt to make women conscious of their social and political rights. The association launched suffrage campaign demanding that Indian women should be franchised. Indeed this was the first attempt made by women for their political rights.² A deputation of Indian women led by Sarojini Naidu met Lord Chelmsford the then Viceroy of India and Lord Montague the Secretary of State for India and demanded that "women may be recognized as people", when the franchise was being drawn up. In December 1917, Annie Beasant and few other women went to

meet the Montague-Chelmsford committee given incharge of assessing the public opinion about an increased participation of Indians to the Government and demanded that women be given the same voting rights as men.³ This was the first delegation representing women's organization which argued the women's political participation. The Southborough committee was appointed in 1918 to draw up the franchise framework of India based on the Montford report. Fourteen women from different provinces joined the deputation and presented a memorandum to the Southborough Committee. Kamalabhai Chattopadya, Rukmani Arundale, Muthulakshmi Reddy and Rukmani Lakshmi-pathy were the distinguished participants from the Madras Province. The committee primarily rejected the memorandum. Then the WIA planned to organize meetings all over India to urge the demand of women franchise and send a deputation to England.⁴ This was followed by an active campaign for women's suffrage by H.Tata and M.Tata in 1919 in London where the campaign received a strong support from British women. When Montague discussed Indian demands for political representation, women's wings of political parties raised the issue of women's suffrage.⁵ The political entry of these women marked the beginning of a new phase in which women started agitations demanding their political rights.

The Act of 1919 provided the women with limited franchise based on age and property. This made the educated and politically conscious women more disappointed. This laid to the foundation of an organization of All India