

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF K . KAMARAJ TO MODERN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

This paper discusses K. Kamaraj's significant contributions to the modernization of the state of Tamil Nadu. It traces his life's journey—from a childhood marked by economic hardship to his involvement in India's struggle for independence via the Congress Party, including his participation in protests such as the Flag Satyagraha, Sword Satyagraha, and Neill Satyagraha. The primary focus of this article is his tenure as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, which began in 1954. Under his leadership, he revolutionized the education sector by introducing free education, compulsory schooling, and the Midday Meal Scheme, all of which dramatically boosted literacy rates and student enrollment. Beyond education, Kamaraj initiated large-scale irrigation projects, provided pension benefits for teachers, and promoted rural electrification and industrial growth. Ultimately, Kamaraj's corruption-free and highly dedicated leadership successfully advanced Tamil Nadu economically, socially, and educationally; consequently, he was awarded the Bharat Ratna, and his birthday is commemorated as Education Development Day.

Keyword: K. Kamaraj, Tamil Nadu, Freedom Struggle, Educational Reform, Midday Meal Scheme, Irrigation Projects, Industrial Development, Chief Minister.

INTRODUCTION

Kamaraj was initially named as Kamatchi in gratitude and reverence to the famous deity. However, later the name was changed to kamaraj. Two years later a girl was born to couple and was named Nagammal. Kamaraj was, by nature, retired, shy and soft-spoken. In fact he spoke very little unlike the boys of his age. He was sent to school at the age of five and received harsh treatments, like many other boys, from a primary school teacher velayutham. His parents shifted him to an elementary school where he learnt to read and write in Tamil. In the following years he was transferred to Kshatriya Vidayasala, the only high school then in Virudupatti.

The year 1911 rather turned out quite calamitous for young kamaraj. Kamaraj's grandfather Chinnappa Nader passed away on First of July and within four months Kamaraj's father passed away on October 16. The income of the family came to a sudden and shocking halt as both the earning members of the family had demised within a very short span of time and the family was left only women and children. Kamarajar and his sister were in their age of eight and six respectively and their mother did not have any source of income for the family. Though karuppaiah, kamaraj's maternal uncle, came forward to help the family, kamaraj's mother Sivakamiammal was not willing to accept the help as she considered depending on others to run the family was not the right thing. She sold all her jewels for Rs.3000 and invested the money in with a trustable local trader.

CONGRESS PARTY

Kamaraj's interest on Indian freedom struggle had intensified during the cloth shop days through posters of 'Vande Matharam' activists and from speeches of freedom fighters like V.O. Chidambaram. Subramanya Siva, Subramanya Bharathi. etc.,

BACHELOR FOR LIFE

During this time, Kamaraj's mother tried to get his only son married to his sister Nagammal's eldest daughter Mangalam. The mother's interest was to divert his son's interest and activities in freedom fighting by tying him with the burden of starting a family. However, Kamaraj firmly refused and declared that he had no slightest idea of getting married or starting a family but decided to dedicate his life to free India. Kamaraj's mother was shocked but did not compel her son right away as she believed the time would bring changes to his decision. After a year she tried to convince Kamaraj to marry Nagammal's another daughter Kamala Devi. Kamaraj refused firmly, again.

GANDHI and KAMARAJ

Kamaraj for the first time met Gandhi on September 21, 1921, after two years from his joining in the Congress Party. Gandhi was on his visit to Madurai, as a party of his broader tour across India to gather people's support for the Satyagraha and freedom movements. After Gandhi's address to public in Madurai, Kamaraj met him that night at the place where Gandhi had stayed. That meeting had energized Kamaraj even stronger than before in freedom fighting and subsequently he arranged many public addresses and conferences to national leaders to spread the need of freedom of nation among the masses.

FLAG SATYAGRAHA

British Government had banned in 1923, the carrying of Indian National Congress flag in Nagpur residential areas. Congress Party announced flag satyagraha against this ban and Congress Party members from all over the country were invited to Nagpur to participate in the protest against the ban. From Tamilnadu, Kamaraj led the efforts and guided supporters to Nagpur. However, before their arrival to Nagpur, Flag Satyagraha had been withdrawn.

SWORD SATYAGRAHA

In 1927, British Government banned the carrying of swords and similar long knives by Indians. Congress Party decided to send a strong signal to the British against the ban. Sword Satyagraha was begun on June 16, 1927. Kamaraj and his friend K.S. Muthuswamy of Virudunagar assisted the Satyagrahis by supplying them with half a dozen swords. Kamaraj also organized a procession in Virudunagar and his plan was to extend the procession to Madurai. At the procession Kamaraj went along with singing the patriotic songs of Bharathi.

NEILL SATYAGRAHA

General James George Smith Neill, who known for his cruel killing of India soldiers in Sepoy mutiny 1857, and had been given honour by erecting a statue for him at Mount Road, Chennai in 1860. On October 11, 1927, an agitation was launched by the Madras Congress Party to remove the Neill Statue. Gandhi had given his consent for the proposal and emphasized the activities should be limited to throwing of small clay balls to indicate the hatred that people of India have for Neill. However, many leaders including Somayajulu and Srinivasa Varadhan succeeded in breaking a portion of sheath of the sword carried by Neill and hoisting the national flag on it. Eventually the Neill statue was removed after a decade, in 1937, and placed in Connemara museum.

The 43rd annual session of Indian National Congress was scheduled in Tamilnadu. In 1927, the session happened near Ignore, Chennai at the place 'Erikarai Thidal'. Dr. Ansari was the president of the session and Kamaraj participated on behalf of Tamilnadu Congress Party. Nehru was on Europe tour and he came to attend the session with his family from the tour. In his address he explained the details of complete freedom, self-governance, and war threats amongst other important issues. Proposals were made on all these issues and were unanimously agreed by the Party. Kamaraj met Nehru there for the first time, together with Satyamurthi and managed to ensure Nehru's presence for a conference he was arranging at his hometown Virudunagar.

CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMILNADU

On April 13, 1954, K. Kamaraj reluctantly became the Chief Minister of Madras. To everyone's surprise, Kamaraj nominated C. Subramaniam and M. Bhakthavatsalam, who had contested his leadership, to the newly formed Cabinet. Kamaraj gave simple advice to his ministers, "Face the problem. Don't evade it. Find a solution, however small.... People will be satisfied if you do something." The State made immense strides in education and trade. New schools were opened, better facilities were added to existing ones. No village remained without a primary school and no panchayat without a high school. Kamaraj strove to eradicate illiteracy by introducing free and compulsory education up to eleventh standard. He introduced the midday meal Scheme to provide at least one meal per day to the lakhs of poor children. He introduced free school uniforms to weed out caste, creed and class distinctions among young minds.

EDUCATION

During British rule the education was only 7 per cent. But in Kamaraj's period it was 37 per cent. During Rajaji's period there were 12,000 schools in the state. Where it was 27,000 in the period of Kamaraj. Power supply in all the villages and industrial growth were there in the period of Kamaraj. Tamils compared the education and knowledge to our eyes. Hence Tamilians were considered as genius. Kamaraj who hailed from this group made a revolution in education. Kamaraj removed the system of communal education started by Rajaji. He ordered to reopen the 6,000 elementary schools closed by Rajaji. Moreover he opened 14,000 new schools.

During first plan schools which were about 21,500 in number had gone upto 26,750 during 2nd plan which crossed over 30,000 later. Likewise the admission of students also went up gradually from 25 lakhs to 33.8 and to 46.1 lakhs. During 3rd plan it was decided to admit 14 Lakhs more students.

MIDDAY MEAL AND FREE EDUCATION

At first Midday Meal Scheme properly started in 1956. Over 14 lakhs student were benefited. This scheme got help from CARE OF USA in 1961-62 Milk powder, corn flour and refined vegetable oils were sent free of costs to schools from CARE. Kamarajar who was deeply worried about the growth of education decided to induce the interest public. The government took responsibility to govern, fulfill the Schemes for the growth of education. These were intensified during Kamaraj's period only. But public did not show their interest and direct involvement.

Onwards from 1956-57 free education was given to the children of elementary school teacher, police constables, head constables and the lower grade employees of government. It came to know in the next year that only 17 per cent of students were not getting free education. To compensate this a scheme for free education to all was announced in 1962.

TEACHER PENSION AND MEDICAL COLLEGE

K. Kamaraj introduced a scheme providing pension, provident fund and compulsory insurance to teacher which were not their so far. He had introduced this scheme for the first time in India. Along with this he introduced family pension also to the teacher.

Scheme was also introduced to provide quarters to the teacher of village school. Rs 25 lakhs were allotted to the scheme. Construction of 750 houses was planned. Kamarajar also arranged to give interest free loans to the poor students of medical college, engineering college and agricultural college. This has improved in admission of Engineering College and Medical College in every year. Facility to train nurses in hospitals were also increased.

Very number of Arts colleges were increased in the period of Kamarajar, 2 PT College, 10 Teacher training colleges and 39 Teacher training schools were opened in his period. His government made arrangement to open one more university in his period.

IRRIGATION

Major irrigation schemes were planned in Kamaraj's period. Lower Bhavani, Mani Muthuar, Cauvery Delta, Aarani River, Vailgai Dam, Amravathi, Sathanur, Krishnagiri, Pullambadi, parambikulam and Neyaru Dams were among them. The lower Bhavani Dam in Coimbatore district was constructed with an expenditure of Rs. 10 crores. 2,07,000 acres of land are under cultivation.

About 45,000 acres of arable land are benefited through Mettur canal of Salem. Another scheme was Krishnagiri in the same district. Vaigai, Sathanur facilitate to Cultivate thousands of acres of lands in Madurai and North Arcot districts respectively. Rs.30 crores were planned to spend for Parambikulam River scheme in Kamaraj's period. This has helped for the development of Coimbatore district agriculture field.

In 1957-61 1,628 Tanks were de-silted under Small Irrigation Scheme 2000 wells were dugged with outlets. Long term loans with 25 per cent subsidy were given oil engines, electric pump sets on instalment basis. 150 lakhs of acres of lands were cultivated during Kamaraj's period. One third of this, i.e. 56 lakhs of acres of land get permanent watering facility.

INDUSTRIES

Major industries with an investment in crores of Rupees were started in his period. Neyveli Lignite Scheme, Raw photo film industry at Nilgiri, Surgical instruments factory at Guindy, Sugar Factories, Bi-Carbonates factories, Cement Factories, Railway coach factory at Avadi, Mettur paper industry, were started only in the period of Kamarajar. These are the backbone of the development of the nation.

The result is that Madras state stood first in India in providing electricity to rural areas. About 13,300 villages were give electricity during 1955-61. Using electric power for agriculture purpose, Madras state stands first. Expense to improve electricity situation at Madras in 1959 was Rs. 2.71 crores. Hydro power station at

Periyar was constructed at an expenditure of Rs. 9 crores. 1 lakh KW of electricity produced under this scheme.

Well-known Kunda Dam project was constructed at an expenditure of Rs. 3.5 crores. Nehruji inaugurated this project. It was completed in very short period by over engineers which made foreigners to wonder. In 1958-59, the investment in electricity connection was 95 crores and the income increased to Rs. 12 crores.

LAST DAYS AND DEMISE

On October 2, 1975, Gandhi Jayanti, K. Kamaraj awoke from his afternoon nap feeling uneasy. His housekeeper, Vairavan, rang up his physician. While he was on his way out, Kamaraj said, "Vairavan, put out the lights when you go out." K. Kamaraj died that day. He was honoured with the highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, posthumously in 1976.

BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Kamarajar birth anniversary has been declared as 'Educational Development Day' Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi on Saturday announced that the State Government would enact a law in the forthcoming Assembly session to declare Kamarajar birth anniversary (July 15) as 'Educational Development Day'.

CONCLUSION

A person or administrator may die one day but their name has been written in all syllabus of Tamilnadu education board, social service board, achievement board and remarkable leader's board in Tamilnadu political history. All these praiseworthy names and characters came to him owing to his marvelous, splendid, luminous, esthetic, sparkling and holy attitude of Perunthalaivar K. Kamaraj in southern region in Tamilnadu politics. Still he has been role model of so many young students, politicians, administrator, workers and others because his genuine and good administration during his political power got to him all these good characters and names. Yet in future and present his name would be spoken and character could not be destroyed.

Kamarajar was Chief Minister of Tamilnadu for all but a decade from 1954 to 1963. His accomplishment, as we listed some of them as freedom fighter, King Maker, seasoned diplomat, educational philanthropist, uncorrupted administrator and up-lifter of poor, when he passed away at the age of seventy two, 1975, were unusual and beyond any reasonable and logical imagination. Economically, socially, educationally he brought the Tamilnadu state to the forefront. His cordial relationship and political influence with the central government allowed him to lead the state in right pathway. He was able to utilize all the resources for proper progress. By setting aside conservatives, he stood for the progressive in the overall development of Tamilnadu.

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