

IYOTHEE THASS PANDITHAR – A HARBINGER OF DRAVIDIAN IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Only a few legendary leaders think wise about the social development and social justice before people to perceive the problem even to conceive it is a problem. By the way the great leaders like Periyar, Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, Rettaimalai Srinivasan and Ambedkar, they were not only identify the problem and they move towards the issues and gave the solution to the problem to the futuristic approach to the society. Hence they were called as forerunners, reformers, social thinkers, elite people and etc. On this historic path Iyothee Thass Pandithar step ahead on before leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar in leading a crusade against the social evil of "untouchability" through his writings use the medium on print media. During the time of Iyothee Thass Pandithar, downtrodden people suffered awful, also helpless in the society even they are not to speak the issue or they write the same. But Iyothee Thass Pandithar, a visionary leader to identify the problem of downtrodden people and expose to the society, being a role model to other leaders and commoners on this own life journey on future. This article to discuss why the legendary leaders to choose Dravidian ideology¹ should be the right path for annihilate the social inequality and to develop the downtrodden people on the crucial period. Also how Iyothee Thass Pandithar saw this issue on a panoramic view and making a great path for oppressed society.

IYOTHIDASA PANDITHAR

Iyothee Pandithar birth name was Kathavarayan, an activist, writer, politician, revivalist and social reformer who propounded and campaigned against social discrimination and Dravidian ideology for social change. He was born on 20 May 1845² in Coimbatore, grew up in Nilgiris because his grandfather worked there. He adopted his teacher's name Iyothee Thass Pandithar. He was a Siddha doctor by profession possessed a good knowledge of classical literary Tamil, and mastered the English language. In fact recent research tells us that he was a great expert in reading palm leaf manuscripts, philosophy, Siddha and one who possessed good knowledge of English, Sanskrit and Pali. Iyothee Thass's grandfather Kandasamy had served as a butler to Lord Arlington and as a youngster; he was exposed to British culture. Iyothee Thass launched a magazine called *Dravida Pandian* along with Rev. John Rathinam in 1885. He

¹R. Swaminatha Aiyar, **Dravidian Theories**, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987, p.6

²G. Aloysius., (Ed.), **Ayothee Dasar Sinthanaikal**, Vol. 1, FRRC, Palayamkottai, 2003.

issued a statement in 1886 announcing that the so-called 'untouchables' are not Hindus. During the 1881 Census he urged the 'untouchables' to register themselves as casteless Dravidians and established the Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1891³.

Dravidian institution

The originator of the current Dravidian theory was the Bishop Caldwell and also he coined the term "Dravidian" after the research on Dravidian languages resulted all languages belonged to one family⁴, based on the usage of the Sanskrit word *Dravida* in the work *Tantravarttika* by Kumarila Bhatta. Also Sir William Jones was a great scholar and founder of Asiatic Society of Bengal who worked as a jurist of the Calcutta High Court. In 1786 he proposed a historical relationship between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin as part of his "Third Anniversary Discourse" to the institution which he founded earlier. In Tamilnadu there are several Dravidian institutions successfully organised, first one was Aadhi Dravida Mahajanasabha (1893), earlier it was called as Paraiyar Mahajana Sabha (1891) founded by the great revivalist Rettaimali Srinivasan. Next one was South Indian Liberal Organisation (1916)⁵, which was founded by around 30 prominent non-Brahmin leaders including Dr Natesa Mudaliyar, Sir PT Theyagaraya Chetty, TM Nair and a woman Alamelu Mangai Thayarammal. On November 20, 1916, later they together to form South Indian Liberation Federation (SILF) which would popularly be called as Justice Party after the 'Justice' newspaper it launched to propagate the ideas of social equality. After dramatic changes in Tamilnadu politics a new institution formed that was Dravida Kazhagam (1944), which was launched by Arignar Anna, Chief minister of Tamilnadu. A few years past Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (1967) founded by Kalaignar Karunadhu, also a chief minister of Tamilnadu. Few years later M.G. Ramachandren formed Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (1967). Among this institution Iyothee Thass pandithar's institution called Dravida Mahajana sabha (1891) was the foremost Dravidian institution in entire South India. Also Iyothee Thass pandithar who started the first dravidian institution use the term Dravida before great institution was born on the Dravida name. Iyothee Thass, the first person to use the term Dravidian against Aryan on before the great leaders who acquire this concept. Most important think is Dravidian concept still exist by the leaders and people believed too.

Embrace Buddhism

Iyothee Thass was the first leader who had worked for the cause of revivalism of Buddhism in India. Iyothee Thass meeting with Henry Sterl Olcott, founder of the theosophical society was a turning point of his life. Iyothee thass accompanied with Olcott to srilanka⁶, there he got diksha from Bikkhu sumangalanayake in 1898. After that he came to India and founded

³ M.S.S.Pandiyan, **Notes on the Transformation of Dravidian Ideology**, Madras Institute of Development studies, Chennai, 1994.

⁴ Robert Caldwell, **A comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Or South Indian family of Languages**, Harrison, London, 1856.

⁵ P. Rajaraman, **The Justice party**, Poompozhi publishers, Chennai, 2007, p.32.

⁶ Henry steel olcott, **Old diary leaves**, Cambridge university press, Delhi, 1938, p.348

the society was called as “Sakya Buddhist Society”⁷ which was the first modern social revolutionary movement of downrodden. His enlighten vision to criticize the caste ideology of Brahmanic Hinduism and he believes to adopt Buddhism helping to annihilate castism and getting social equality. Most important thing is he would not embrace Buddhism blindly, but he would learn pali language which contains enormous Buddhist literature then adopted the same. Iyothee Thass gave a new face to Buddhism entitled *Tamil Buddhism*, his Buddhist philosophy concentrated for community and social equality. Iyothee Thass believed that the only way the Dalits could find a place for themselves in Indian society was by way of conversion. Later Ambedkar profound this concept of embrace Buddhism was the great way for social change, like Ayothee Thass Ambedkar gave some different name to his Buddhism called Dhamma⁸. So Iyothee Thass always symbolise the forerunner to periyar, Ambedkar and other leaders.

Forerunner of print media

Iyothee Thass created the first ideological media revolution, writing from his deep personal knowledge to enlighten Dalits on counter subjects. At the time of Iyothee Thass starting a magazine equalled to start an Institution because all institutions were emerged by the foot path of Magazines. On 26th June 1907, he established the magazine called *Orupaisatamizan*, a Tamil weekly which was published and edited by Iyothee Thass on every Wednesday. It was nam Iyothee Thass as Oru paisa. So Alosiyas ,the authour who expose the Iyothee Thass history quoted about *Oru paisa Tamilan* ,The tamil weekly journal was named in this fashion to mean that it was an organ meant to reach the masses. He named it in a democratic sense. But some of the readers in those days insisted on changing the name. Hence, he renamed it as *Tamizhan* and also made some changes to the design of the masthead. Thereafter, he continued to write on many social issues. On 26th August 1908 onwards One paisa word removed and renamed to publish by the name simply ‘*Tamizhan*’ ,because magazine consumers were requested to the author change the magazine name. Without any break this magazine published by Iyothee Dass until his death. After his death Iyothee Thass son Appadurai run the magazine successfully till 1933, In 1933 *Tamilan* magazine was completely stopped. Thass revived Tamil Buddhism through his writing. He and others wrote several articles criticize the Brahminism. The magazine had the dialogues of Tamil Nationalism and laid the foundation for the Dravidian politics. The journal’s statement of intent explains, some philosophers, natural literatures got together and published this *Oru Paisa Tamizhan* in order to teach justice, right path, and truthfulness to the society. *Oru Paisa Tamizhan* promoted Tamil Buddhism⁹, gave information and reports of the new developments in the Buddhist world, sought to interpret the subcontinent’s history, in general, and tamilakam’s in the particular, from the Buddhist point of view, etc. But it was note national-moral discourse against all forms of Brahmanism that had gained ascendancy under the colonial regime.

⁷Sanghakshita, **Ambedkar and Buddhism**, MotilalBanarshidass publishers, Delhi, 2006,p.50.

⁸Omvedt, Gail,**Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste**,SAGE, New Delhi,2005,p.55.

⁹G. Aloysius.,(Ed.), **Ayothee Dasar Sinthanaikal** ,Vol. II,FRRRC,Palayamkottai,2003.p.15.

Social change

The untouchables had different names in different parts of the country. They were called outcasts, Untouchables, pariahs, Panchamas, Athisudras, Avarnas, Antyajias and Namasudras¹⁰. But Iyothee Thass suggests that they were called as Adhitamilar in Tamilnadu instead of Adi Dravida. He asserted that Dalits were the 'AadhiThamizhar'¹¹ (original Tamils) and propagated the message through Oru Paisa Tamilan which was established in 1907 and continued until his death in 1914. Iyothee Thass dreamed of a casteless society. He came to the ideological conclusion that Tamil Buddhism was the right tradition to achieve this ideal. He wrote the history of India in the *Inthiradesa Sarithiram*, in which he argued that before the invasion of the Aryans, Indians were living peacefully without caste, following the doctrines of Buddhism.

Through the 1891, Iyothee Thass organised the conference for propagated his cognitive ideas like to upliftment of downtrodden. He drafting a ten great ideas and recommended the same for social change, including generate the schools for furnish the matriculation education for downrodden society, because that period education refused to them. Next he propagated, a criminal law to punish the untouchables by calling them pariahs, and important recommendation untouchables should be represented in District Boards and Municipal Boards. Also he wants untouchables should get employment, so he suggested this ideas too. With the support of Madam blavatsky and Henry olcott¹², Iyothee Thass acted as a driving force for establishing several panjamar school¹³ in Chennai in 1894, though he proved, pioneer of education development for downrodden

Thus Iyothee Thass was the first to leader to identified embrace Buddhism was the way to annihilate social discrimination and eliminate social inequality. Also he believed the print media was the right path and correct way to making awareness to the society. However, his Dravidian identity a unique path to the downtrodden, acquired after IyotheeThass Pandithar also called the champion of downtrodden ever. Throughout his life he thought to promote social change by the way of Buddhism and print media and his institution Dravida Mahaja Sabha. However Some of Leader was celebrated all over the country ever, but some leaders like Iyothee Thass was not celebrated and forgotten by the authors.

¹⁰ A. Kumar, **Social Transformantion in Modern India**, Sarup & Sons, Delhi, 2001.p.9.

¹¹Tamilan, magazine dated 14 Oct 1908

¹³A.k. Geetha, **Contesting Categories, and Remapping Boundaries: Literary Interventions by Tamil Dalits**, Cambridge University press, Delhi, 2014.p.40.