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**FIRST REVOLT IN D.M.K AND EXIT OF E.V.K. SAMPATH-A STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP IN TAMIL NADU POLITICS****M. Sivakumar****Full-Time Ph.D. Scholar in History,  
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(Affiliated to the University of Madras) Nandanam, Chennai.****ABSTRACT**

E.V.K. Sampath (1926–1977) was a distinguished intellectual, an extraordinary orator, and a founding member of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.). Affectionately known as 'Sollin Selvar' (Master of Words), Sampath was the nephew of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidar Kazhagam (D.K.). When C.N. Annadurai parted ways with Periyar in 1949 to establish the D.M.K., Sampath prioritized principles over family loyalty and became one of the new party's key architects. In 1957, he became one of the D.M.K.'s first Members of Parliament, representing Namakkal in the Lok Sabha. However, by the late 1950s, deep ideological rifts emerged between Sampath and the party leadership, culminating in 1961 in the first major ideological revolt and split in the D.M.K.'s history. The conflict between Sampath and the D.M.K. leadership, specifically C.N. Annadurai and the rising figure M. Karunanidhi, stemmed from fundamental ideological differences, organizational friction, and a struggle over intra-party democracy.



Following his experience in national politics in New Delhi and an international trip to the Soviet Union in 1958, Sampath realized, earlier than his colleagues, that the pursuit of a sovereign and independent 'Dravida Nadu' state was a completely futile endeavour within India's constitutional framework. While the D.M.K. leadership continued to actively champion this idea, he openly criticized the separatist demand, describing it as an 'outdated fantasy'. Sampath grew increasingly uneasy about M. Karunanidhi's rising organizational dominance. To curb this trend, he ensured that the D.M.K. General Council ratified a resolution in July 1959 stipulating that the person elected as General Secretary could not hold a seat in the legislature. This measure was interpreted by the public as a direct attempt to check Karunanidhi's rapid ascent. Sampath advocated for a more radical, militant, and socialist political approach, firmly leaning towards an alliance with the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.). In contrast, Annadurai favoured moderate and constitutional methods, preferring to ally with the pro-capitalist Swatantra Party led by C. Rajagopalachari. Furthermore, Sampath opposed the growing influence of film stars within the party, believing that reliance on the film industry undermined the party's core rationalist ideologies. Reacting against what he termed a 'dictatorial attitude' and the rising lack of discipline among senior leaders, Sampath launched a three-day hunger strike in February 1961 to demand democratic reforms within the party. Although Annadurai managed to temporarily appease him by promising to purge harmful elements, this compromise was short-lived.

**KEYWORDS:** *D.M.K., C.N.Annadurai, E.V.K.Sampath, V.R.Nedunchezian, M.Karunanidhi, Dravida Nadu, Periyar E.V.Ramasami, V.P.Raman, Congress.*

## INTRODUCTION

V.R. Nedunchezian's election as General Secretary of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) in 1955, succeeding C. N. Annadurai<sup>1</sup>, was the result of a minor rivalry between E.V.K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi. E.V.K. Sampath, a nephew of E. V. Ramasami and a talented propagandist, had been a valuable asset to the newly formed D.M.K. party in 1949.<sup>2</sup> Initially, Sampath was among the organization's key leaders, alongside Nedunchezian, Mathiazhagan, N. V. Natarajan, and M. Karunanidhi. Although Nedunchezian was elected General Secretary in 1955, many regarded Sampath as the party's 'number two'.

When the D.M.K. was founded, C.N.Annadurai had announced that the role of General Secretary would rotate among senior leaders to prevent the kind of totalitarianism associated with the D.K. (Dravidar Kazhagam). Annadurai held the position of General Secretary from 1949 to 1955. When he sought to implement the rotation plan in 1955, both E.V.K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi actively vied for the post. Ultimately, it was decided to appoint V.R. Nedunchezian as a compromise candidate. It is worth to note that there were no factions or factionalism within the D.M.K. party at the time. The disagreement was limited to a rivalry between individuals rather than a conflict between organized and cohesive groups.

The roots of the divisions within the D.M.K. was traced back to Karunanidhi's founding of the '*Murasoli*' newspaper in Chennai in 1954.<sup>3</sup> To count E.V.K.Sampath's revolt, by 17<sup>th</sup> September 1960, what '*Murasoli*' started as handwritten journal in Thiruvavur, became a powerful party daily.<sup>4</sup> While organizing newspaper distributors in remote villages, Karunanidhi was simultaneously building party units and a personal support network. Over time, he began asking these units to back specific candidates for positions at the taluk (administrative division) and district levels, as well as for seats on the General Council. He secured the loyalty of many within the party by doing them various favours. Karunanidhi generally preferred to surround himself with the party's more pragmatic elements. Indeed, he was said to have argued in internal meetings that politics, like any other line of work, was a business. In any case, his reputation as a pragmatist willing to dispense favours drew to his side those who sought to profit through the party, particularly by leveraging the organization's ties to the film industry. The relationship between the film industry and the party was not parasitic but mutually beneficial and symbiotic. While the party conducted effective propaganda and strengthened its organizational infrastructure through its cinematic connections. Certain films and actors gained popularity thanks to their links with the D.M.K.

Between 1959 and 1960, the D.M.K. initiated an internal election process that marked the beginning of a conflict between E. V. K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi, a dispute that would ultimately lead to the party's split. As with other political groups, these electoral processes triggered friction, factionalism, and divisions by creating rifts among top leaders. By 1960, a direct clash between Sampath and Karunanidhi for the post of D.M.K. General Secretary seemed inevitable. However, guided by the 'Mayavaram Resolution', the two sides opted instead to field their own respective candidates, K. A. Mathialagan and C. P. Cittrarasu. Recognizing that this indirect rivalry could lead to a schism, Annadurai announced that he would personally assume the role of General Secretary. This move averted a split by facilitating a compromise through the distribution of responsibilities: Sampath took on the role of Executive Committee Chairman, while Karunanidhi assumed the position of Treasurer. Yet, this truce proved short-lived.<sup>5</sup>

Another significant faction that emerged prior to 1961 was associated with E.V.K. Sampath. Aside from a student wing, Sampath's factional organization did not extend much beyond the General Council and the upper echelons of leadership. Although Sampath lacked the broad-based support which Karunanidhi enjoyed, he nevertheless managed to secure the backing of a majority of General Council and Executive Committee members at critical junctures.<sup>6</sup>

However, by 1961, Sampath had left the party.<sup>7</sup> He argued that non-political figures such as film actors and playwrights were given excessive prominence in party affairs. They were often prioritized at public events, and the public showed greater interest in seeing and hearing film stars than political speakers. Sampath believed that placing such heavy emphasis on film actors and individuals linked to the industry undermined the party's seriousness. Moreover, this stance likely stemmed from something far deeper than a simple concern that film stars might overshadow ordinary D.M.K. members. Both M.Karunanidhi and C.N. Annadurai were prominent figures in the world of Tamil cinema and had recruited various personalities from that sphere into the party's ranks. The vast majority of cinema-industry members associated with the party belonged to Karunanidhi's faction. Those who did not belong to this group were followers of Kannadasan, a poet and Tamil film lyricist whose feud with Karunanidhi in the film industry had spilled over into party politics. Over time, Kannadasan's followers came to be identified with Sampath's faction.<sup>8</sup>

Another issue which was related contested politics was the bureaucratization of the D.M.K. party. Sampath firmly advocated the view that the D.M.K. should dedicate itself solely to politics. His time in the Lok Sabha in Delhi had undoubtedly influenced this perspective. He was dissatisfied with the D.M.K.'s present state, regardless of whether it was viewed as a social reform movement or a political party. Although the D.M.K. supported numerous cultural activities and engaged in social reform initiatives, Sampath considered such activities to be apolitical in nature. Furthermore, he believed that the party's close ties to the film industry hindered its transformation into a full-fledged political party. To Sampath, at least at that time, the Congress Party represented a model of how a political party should exist and be organized. However, Karunanidhi and Annadurai were reluctant to alter a party formula that had proven successful. They did not oppose greater institutionalization of the party's internal operations, yet they differed on the methods and pace of such a transformation.

The third issue concerned the party's ideology. Among the rank-and-file members, E.V.K. Sampath was perceived as a champion of the organization's radical ideological goals, in contrast to Karunanidhi's pragmatism. Some of the support Sampath's faction received from the lower echelons of the leadership stemmed from this misinterpretation of his intentions. Many activists, who rejected the party's shift away from its line of radical social reform, attributed this change to Karunanidhi's influence and seized the opportunity to oppose him. However, this perception of Sampath's stance was mistaken. Within the senior leadership, the fundamental ideological issue was how to handle the demand for 'Dravida Nadu'. Sampath argued that this demand should be abandoned immediately. Personally, he considered the 'Dravida Nadu' project unfeasible and believed that the D.M.K. would cease to exist if the Delhi government, a likely scenario, were to ban separatist parties.

At the highest levels of the leadership, the idea of establishing an independent Dravida Nadu had already been significantly undermined. V. P. Raman, a Brahmin who joined the party in 1958 and quickly assumed a leadership role, played a pivotal part in this process. Raman was a wealthy and talented lawyer with an excellent command of English. Thanks to his ability and the symbolic value he held as a supporter of Brahmin origin, he was entrusted with increasing responsibilities within the party, particularly regarding the drafting of articles for the English-language press.

From 1958 onwards, Raman's spacious home in Madras became a meeting point for leaders arriving from both rural areas (mofussil) and the city of Madras itself. Prominent leaders would gather there every evening for consultations. At the time, the party lacked a headquarters that could serve as a meeting venue, while Annadurai lived and conducted his work in Kanchipuram. During these meetings, Raman consistently questioned the possibility of realizing 'Dravida Nadu'. He argued that the idea was impossible to achieve due to the lack of support for it from Kerala, Mysore, and Andhra Pradesh. Furthermore, he pointed out that just as establishing 'Dravida Nadu' was impossible, an attempt to secure an independent Tamil Nadu, even if it commanded greater public support, might not be economically or militarily viable.<sup>9</sup>

By ultimately persuading a sufficient number of leaders with his arguments, he paved the way for a meeting to be held at his home in November 1960 to discuss the issue thoroughly. C.N. Annadurai did not attend the meeting. In fact, he was not even aware that it was taking place. The consensus

reached at the meeting was to publicly abandon the demand for 'Dravida Nadu'. Prominent D.M.K. leaders such as Karunanidhi, Nedunchezian, Sampath, Raman, and Mathiazhagan were present and expressed their approval of the decision. However, Mathiazhagan was uneasy about Annadurai's absence and summoned him to Kanchipuram after the meeting concluded. Annadurai immediately travelled to Madras, and another meeting was held at Raman's house. There, Annadurai pointed out that the party was founded on the separatist demand, stating that the organization could not simply abandon it without losing credibility among mid-level cadres and the rank and file. Nevertheless, he promised to gradually prepare the party to eventually drop the 'Dravida Nadu' demand.<sup>10</sup>

The leaking of distorted rumours regarding the meeting at Raman's house and the discussions on 'Dravida Nadu' caused confusion within the party. Sampath saw this as an opportune moment to call for internal party reforms. As this period coincided with the election for the post of general secretary, these issues surfaced during the power struggle between E.V.K. Sampath and M. Karunanidhi. Seeing a chance to discredit a formidable rival, Karunanidhi began to mount a cautious opposition against Sampath. Karunanidhi initially took a stance in defense of actors and other individuals associated with the film industry. Tensions escalated to such a point that, during a D.M.K. meeting, Sampath was attacked by thugs allegedly hired by Madurai Muthu, one of Karunanidhi's close associates.<sup>11</sup>

For idealists who believed the party had been in decline since 1957, Sampath offered the promise of a revival. Many viewed him as a radical figure regarding issues such as 'Dravida Nadu' and social reform. Open supporters of Sampath emerged among both student groups and certain D.M.K.-affiliated trade unions, and various factions began to organize around him. Part of the student support for Sampath stemmed from dissatisfaction with a 1958 decision, embodied in Government Order No. 240, in which Annadurai accepted Congress proposals to limit student political activity. Although T. K. Ponnuvelu, leader of the Dravida Manaver Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Students' Progressive Association), had vehemently opposed this restriction, he had ultimately yielded. Other student leaders, however, were not so easily persuaded. Believing that the party possessed the fastest-growing student organizations, they felt this agreement ran counter to the D.M.K.'s interests.

The growing support for Sampath which stemmed from a misinterpretation of his stance on Dravida Nadu and other issues began to worry Annadurai. Annadurai had steered clear of factional conflicts and had not expressed a preference regarding the election of the General Secretary. Nedunchezian's tenure had demonstrated that having anyone other than Annadurai in this role was a futile exercise, as key decisions ultimately remained in Annadurai's hands. Annadurai had likely realized that Sampath's proposals would harm the party. After all, he understood better than anyone the emotional and symbolic weight of the 'Dravida Nadu' cause and the extreme delicacy required in abandoning it. Consequently, Annadurai began to quietly oppose Sampath. Karunanidhi immediately grasped the opportunities presented by the situation and made moves to prompt the overconfident Sampath to challenge Annadurai directly.

By the time Sampath found himself challenging Annadurai, and Annadurai had abandoned his neutrality by publishing a series of articles in his journal '*Dravida Nadu*' titled 'All are Kings in this Nation' based on George Bernard Shaw's play, '*The Apple Cart*'.<sup>12</sup> Sampath was convinced that the satire was aimed at him and responded with a caustic rejoinder in Kannadasan's Thendral. Titled '*Annavaṇṇa Mannann*' (Anna's king), it launched a virtual war against all those who opposed him in various part for a. Sampath's counter article appeared on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1961.<sup>13</sup> Sampath had already lost the battle. On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1961, Sampath began an indefinite hunger strike aimed at restoring unity within the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.), a party fractured by internal strife.<sup>14</sup> Together with V. Munusami, the then Mayor of Madras and an ally from Sampath's faction, he set up a covered platform (*pandal*) near a local high school, adorned it with the black-and-red flags of the D.M.K., and commenced his fast. As he was a Member of Parliament at the time, his hunger strike attracted significant media attention. Until then, the D.M.K. had received very limited coverage in the English-language press. However, *The Hindu* and *The Mail*, the two most prominent English newspapers in Madras State reported on the party's internal discord. Annadurai and other senior D.M.K. leaders were compelled to reach out to Sampath in an effort to resolve the party's issues. D.M.K. leaders Mathiazhagan, Natarajan, Aasaitambi,

and Nedunchezian, all of whom sided with or sympathized with Sampath, worked intensively to reach an agreement during the fast. Annadurai expressed his concern and visited Sampath frequently.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these internal rifts, conflicts erupted within the City Corporation Council which had been under D.M.K. control since 1959 and a physical altercation even broke out in the Madras Legislative Assembly between rival factions within the D.M.K. itself. On the third day of Sampath's hunger strike, Annadurai assured him that every effort would be made to identify harmful forces within the organization and to purge such elements without hesitation or favouritism.<sup>16</sup> He also expressed his dismay at the tendency to resort to violence when airing political differences. Annadurai emphasized that he was just as keen as Sampath to preserve the integrity of the party, built through tears and arduous labour, and to ensure the organization maintained the highest standards of purity and discipline. Furthermore, he noted that he had observed signs of the shift in attitude Sampath had longed for.<sup>17</sup> These events took place in February. However, the appearance of unity was short-lived. Supporters of Karunanidhi and Sampath continued to criticize one another harshly, and eventually, both leaders resumed their mutual attacks. Annadurai penned a series of articles criticizing Sampath. With Sampath's decision not to abandon his demand for secession, the issue of 'Dravida Nadu' was effectively brought to a conclusion. Annadurai's decision to openly side with Karunanidhi left Sampath with no choice but to either submit or break away.

Sampath had apparently been led to believe that a far greater number of members would leave the party with him than actually did. Among Sampath's supporters were Aasaithambi, K. Kamaraj's nephew and the editor of a Tamil publication, and Kannadasan, the editor of the Tamil magazine 'Thenral'. His followers included T. K. Srinivasan, a regular contributor to 'Dravidam', C. P. Arasu, the editor of a Tamil publication, Anbazhahan, a powerful speaker and, Tamil language expert, T. K. Ponnuvelu, a prominent student leader and Mathiazhagan, one of the party's key founders and leaders. However, when Sampath left the organization, only Kannadasan went with him. Although Madras Mayor V. Munusami initially withdrew, he soon returned after facing the prospect of prolonged political marginalization that would accompany the process of forming a new party.<sup>18</sup>

Prominent leaders abandoned Sampath. This event had a significant impact on the D.M.K. party leadership in 1961. Above all, these leaders were well aware of Sampath's ideological stance. They had either attended meetings at V. P. Raman's home or learned of the discussions held there from reliable sources. Furthermore, they were familiar with Sampath's ideas for revitalizing the party and recognized that the ideological differences between him and Annadurai or between him and Karunanidhi were not fundamental. The points of disagreement were tactical in nature, such as when and how to formally abandon the demand for 'Dravida Nadu'. Another issue was the role played by the film community within the party and the use of theater as a tool for political propaganda. Even under the leadership of a prominent politician like Sampath, these matters did not carry enough weight to drive them to leave the party.

Secondly, by 1961, the D.M.K. had become sufficiently institutionalized and a significant number of leaders had acquired tangible stakes within the party, enabling the organization to act as a counterweight to the factional tendencies threatening to tear it apart. Many of the key leaders who supported Sampath were reluctant to leave the party they had played a vital role in founding.

However, pragmatic explanations alone were insufficient. A deep emotional bond with Annadurai was also at play. Even though many senior leaders occasionally disagreed with him, they were unwilling to sever this relationship entirely. To many of them, his *Thambis*, or younger brothers, he remained 'Anna' (elder brother). For others, Annadurai represented the last, albeit faint, hope of achieving their ideological goals. Having material or opportunistic interests in the party did not preclude a commitment to those ideological goals, whether implicit or explicit.

Approximately ten thousand D.M.K. members left the party along with Sampath.<sup>19</sup> Sampath took a large body of his followers with him, including a number of General Council members and seven of D.M.K.'s 47 Madras City Councillors including the Mayor Munuswami.<sup>20</sup> There was considerable confusion among the rank-and-file members regarding the exact stance Sampath was taking; a misconception prevailed that he would spearhead a campaign of action to secure the establishment of

'Dravida Nadu'. Sampath left the party on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1961<sup>21</sup>, and on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1961 y founded a new organization, 'Tamil Desiya Katchi' (Tamil Nationalist Party) (T.N.P.).<sup>22</sup> Outlining the party's objectives on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1961, he advocated for a sovereign and separate Tamil Nadu within the Indian Union, arguing that if a state could not function satisfactorily due to central government controls, it had the right to secede from the union and become sovereign. Such states would possess absolute authority to collect taxes and spend funds as they saw fit.<sup>23</sup> Explaining why party members had left the D.M.K., he stated that the demand for a separate 'Dravida Nadu' was unfeasible, nothing more than a pipe dream.<sup>24</sup> He also accused the D.M.K. of raising unrealistic expectations among the public and pointed out that the organization lacked support in the neighbouring states of Kerala, Mysore, and Andhra Pradesh. It is worth noting that although Sampath had abandoned the demand for a separate 'Dravida Nadu', he characterized the idea not as undesirable, but merely as an unattainable goal.

When it finally became clear that Sampath advocated for completely abandoning the demand for 'Dravida Nadu', many of those who had left the party returned. Consequently, the T.N.P. never managed to establish a lasting presence. The party's primary activity consisted of challenging the D.M.K. leadership over the issue of 'Dravida Nadu'. Recognizing the limitations of his independent party, Sampath accepted an invitation from K. Kamaraj in 1964 to merge the Tamil National Party with the Congress Party, joining the Kamaraj faction which had already absorbed many of E. V. Ramasami's followers.<sup>25</sup> Devoting the remainder of his career to serving as a prominent Congress leader, Sampath held the position of Vice President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (T.N.C.C.) until his passing in 1977.

To conclude, E.V.K. Sampath, the nephew of Periyar E.V. Ramasami was one of the founding leaders of the DMK. However, a significant ideological rift emerged between him and other key leaders such as C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi. Sampath vehemently criticized the growing influence of figures from the film industry within the party, the erosion of internal democracy, and the resort to violent tactics to silence dissenters. As distinct factions formed, tensions within the organization escalated. A physical attack on Sampath during a D.M.K. meeting further heightened this tension, symbolizing the fierce struggle between the party's idealists and its ever-expanding political machinery. Faced with persistent marginalization and hostility, Sampath ultimately left the D.M.K. in 1961. He subsequently founded a short-lived political party, the 'Tamil Desiya Katchi' (Tamil National Party), and later joined Congress. His departure paved the way for Karunanidhi's unstoppable rise within the party hierarchy.

## END NOTES

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