

THE POLITICAL LIFE OF Dr.G.VISWANATHAN

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Viswanathan while studying in the Seventh standard attended a meeting addressed by Periyar at Gudiyatham. Periyar was a firebrand, a revolutionary thinker and an eloquent speaker. His words made an indelible imprint on Viswanathan's young mind. The Dravida Munetra Kazhagam had been formed in 1949 after the party's dynamic leader Arignar Annadurai decided to break away from the parent body, the Dravida Kazhagam headed by Periyar.

Dr. C.N. Annadurai was invited by the Vellore Municipality to unveil a statue of Mahatma Gandhi near fort on 3rd January, 1934. On that day a dozens of young men from Gudiyatham cycled the thirty kilometer stretch to bear Annadurai speech. Viswanathan was one among them.

The Dravida Munetra Kazhagam led by Dr.C.N. Annadurai faced the first election battle the following years. The rising Sun was the party's election symbol. M.P. Sarathy was the party's candidate from the Vellore Constituency. Viswanathan and his comrades worked round the clock to raise funds for this crucial campaign. Viswanathan during his students days at the Voorhees College Annadurai addressed several meetings of Vellore and all the meetings were attended by Viswanathan while Annadurai travelled by car, he followed on a bicycle.

When he became a law student he became the secretary of the Dravida Manavar Munetra Kazhagam (DMMK) the student wing of the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam. Murasoli Selvam a nephew of Karunanithi, was the treasurer. In those days Viswanathan was popularly known as Vellore Viswanathan. It was during this period that Viswanathan began to address a public meeting. His first such address was at Chetput.

The meeting was organized by Minor Moses, who played a major role in Viswanathan's political initiation and later went on to become the Mayor of Madras. G. Viswanathan had a great love and respect for Arignar Annadurai. When Annadurai was imprisoned in the Vellore Jail in 1962. Viswanathan organized a meeting along with Mr. Thoppor Thiruvendkan and Mr.N.V.N. Somn to celebrate Anna's birthday. In the meeting Viswanathan delivered a speech which attracted more to the public. Whenever Annadurai came to Vellore Viswanathan never missed a single meeting. It was the meeting in Gudiyatham that sealed a place for him in Arignar Annadurai's heart.

In 1966, Annadurai came to Gudiyatham to attend a special meeting. This occasion happened to be a major turning point in Viswanathan's political life. For the first time he had an opportunity to address a public meeting in Annadurai's presence.

A month after the Gudiyatham meeting. Annadurai went to Madurai to participate in the party meeting. Where he held the meeting to the party men. I was in Gudiyatham last month but spoke very well. He asked Minor Moses, one of Viswanathan's classmates and his name is Viswanathan. Then Annadurai made an unexpected and dramatic announcement that he will send time to parliament. Minor Moses informed that matter to Viswanathan who was overjoyed. He couldn't believe this unusual stroke of luck Vellore constituency. Which happened to be a reserve constituency set apart for scheduled caste candidate? But Annadurai had definite plans for Viswanathan and selected Wandiwash constituency for him.

At the end of 1966, with election just around the corner, both Viswanathan and Dharmalingam applied for the party ticket. A week later Viswanathan's name was announced as the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam's candidate for the Wandiwash Parliamentary seat. In the parliament election of 1967, he was the youngest candidate who was at that time 28 years old.

Viswanathan's opponent was M. Krishnasamy of the congress a man of no mean stature. But Viswanathan had several advantages. Firstly V.C. Rajagopalchari, a famous advocate in the North Arcot district and he was his junior Secondary he was the son in law of Ramajayam bus owner who was well known to the people. Lastly, at that time Dravida Munetra Kazhagam was extremely popular especially among the younger generation. At a massive rally at Timiri Annadurai first introduced Viswanathan and said "He has studied M.A.B.L., He is better educated than me.

In the 1967, Parliamentary election more than thirty of Viswanathan's classmates and college mates worked night and day for the success from the Wandiwash constituency. As Viswanathan was the son-in-law of wealthy bus owner, he was expected to spend much, more. His actual expenditure was about. Fifty thousand rupees. Viswanathan's parents in law would prove to be a citadel of strength in those crucial years. His mother-in-law Rajammal gave him abundant moral and financial support when he contested the parliamentary election in 1967 and again in 1971.

During the election of 1969 the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam won all the 25 Parliamentary seats it had contested. For the State Assembly seats of 234, the party had contested 174 seats and it won 137. The Congress party won only 51 of the 232 seat it had contested. In Wandiwash Constituency, Viswanathan secured 213,537 votes whereas his opponent M. Krishnamswamy secured

only 132,878 votes. Annadurai had never expected a landslide victory. The anti-Hindi wave and the M.G.R. sympathy wave had combined to catapult the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam candidates to a decisive victory. Annadurai went to meet his minor Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy at Thiruchirapalli and sought his blessings before forming with Swathanthra Kazhagam of Rajaji.

Annadurai resigned his parliament seat of South Madras Constituency and took up the reins of Government. In the Annadurai Minister, Karunanidhi became public works minister. Very soon he proved to be an excellent administrator. Like his mentor Annadurai, Karunanidhi had excellent literary and oratorical skills. Actors like M.G. Ramachandran S.S. Rajendran and K.R. Ramasamy added a touch of glamour to the propagation of the Dravidian ideologies and poets like Kannadasan and Bharathidasan added their flower Lyrics to the flow of ideas.

Annadurai died of Cancer on 3rd February 1969 two years after becoming the Chief Minister. He had been taken to the United States for treatment but the end had come too soon. Over 15 million people attended his funeral, a world record at that time. Viswanathan was heart-broken. Unable to contain his grief at the sudden loss of his political mentor, he wept copious tears. Anna had been grooming

V.R. Nedunchezian and his successor. However, Karunanidhi outmaneuvered him and wrested control of the party and the Government. It is believed that M.G.R. had played a prominent role in helping Karunanidhi to gain control of the party. In 1970, M.G.R. was appointed as the Treasurer of the party.

During this time Viswanathan contested once again from Wandiwash in 1971. His opponent Dr. A. Krishnaswamy, son of well known Krishnaswamy Mudaliar, could not speak in Tamil so he addressed the meeting in English. Viswanathan won the Wandiwash parliamentary seat with majority of votes about 100,000 votes.

He who brought up the issue of corruption and amassment of wealth disproportionate to income. In a democrat turn of events. MGR was expelled from the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam.

The expulsion of MGR culminated in the founding of the Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam on 17th October 1972. MGR became a public hero following his eviction from the Dravida Munetra Kazhagam. Most of the leading Dravida Munetra Kazhagam party second rank leaders gradually shifted their loyalty to MGR. MGR's glory reached its peak when more than five films related in the same year. The Dindigul bye election in May 1973 was an important milestone in the history of Tamil Nadu. The Dravida Muneetra Kazhagam was fielding

Pon. Muthuramalingam whereas MGR chosen K. Maya Thevar. Both were advocates, but this hardly mothered. Ulagam Sutrum Valiban, a film was released a few days before polling date and the film was a box office hit.

The year 1975 marked a very important phase, of his political career. The estimate committee of Tamil Nadu Assembly submitted a report on the smuggling of rice. The support of this, Viswanathan issued a statement stating that the Minister Concerned in the rice smuggling should be dismissed and the officers involved be suspended and cases field against the rice merchants. Finally, the Chief Minister asked him to submit an apology letter. After giving it a deep thought he decided against submitting the letter and return to Vellore. In the same evening, he declared his separation from the party. This was a turning point in his life. From an early age he had involved himself in the party with great dedication but the long bond between him and Dravida Munetra Kazhagam came to an end in 1975.

Two days after his exit from Dravida Muneetra Kazhagam, he met MGR in Chennai who received him with upon arms and invited him for lunch. MGR had to attend a few meeting in North Arcot evening on the banks of the Palar River between Arcot and Ranipet. The meeting attracted a massive crowd where Viswanathan amounted that he had joined the Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam MGR embraced him and absorbed him into the fold.

The Congress and Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam began to come closer. MGR had a great admiration for Mrs. Indira Gandhi and an alliance between the two parties emerged in August 1976. Election was due in 1977. The Karunandhi Government had been dismissed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on allegations relating to the deteriorating law and order situation, sedition and anti-national activities. After some time Umashanka Dixit revealed that Mrs. Indira Gandhi was desirous to have an alliance with the Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam. Viswanathan returned to Madras and briefed MGR about the talks with Dixit. Anna Dravida Munetra Kazhagam along with Congress won a majority of seats in the State Assembly during 1977.

In 1980, MGR was briefly eclipsed when Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who's Congress, had been swept back to power at the centre, impulsively decided to dustiness the Tamil Nadu Government and imposed president's rule. However, when elections were held in May 1980. Anna Dravida Kazhagam comped back to power with a comfortable majority. In that election Viswanathan was given the chance to contest State Assembly from the Anaicut Constituency was allotted to him. Viswanathan won the election by a comfortable margin of 5955 votes and entered the State Assembly for the first time.

Between 1980 and 1985 MGR visited Vellore eight times on several occasion, it was Viswanathan who was chosen to accompany him. In 1983 MGR nominated him as the member of the backward class commission and in 1984 he inspired Viswanathan to start the Vellore Engineering College.

For the second time MGR became seriously ill. He passed away on 25th December, 1987. This was yet another inferable loss for Viswanathan. After the death of MGR, the All India Anna Dravida Muneetra Kazhagam instantaneously spins in two factions the Jayalalitha faction and the Janaki function. Viswanathan remain with Jayalalitha had the support of only about thirty MLAs. Janaki Ramachandran briefly became the Chief Minister. All state ministers and many of the MLAs were in her camp. But her Government lasted barely a month. There was pandemonium in the Assembly and violence on the floor of the House on an

unprecedented scale. The Janaki Government was dismissed by the central government and president's rule imposed. Viswanathan organized a meeting in Vellore to express his support for Ms. Jayalalitha. A huge crowd gathered for the meeting. Following this meeting, he was appointed the district secretary of the Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

During 1989 election birth faction of the All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam lost the 'two-leaves' symbol. The Assembly elections took place in 1989 and AIADMK contested as two groups. Viswanathan contested in the Anaicut constituency under the symbol of 'cock' Dravida Munetra Kazhagam won the election by a difference of 2000 votes. After the election the two factions of AIADMK merged together. On taking over the reins of the united AIADMK for the first time, Jayalalitha strengthened the party and the senior people from the Janaki faction were suitably accommodated at various levels. Under her leadership Viswanathan worked harder than he had ever done in his political career.

Elections to parliament were held in 1989, a few months after the Assembly elections. This time the AIADMK Congress alliance won 38 out of the 39 seats. During the next few years, the AIADMK conducted a series of agitations in Tamil Nadu. When Jayalalitha was attracted on the floor of the asininely by the DMK members, an effigy of Kalaignar was burnt in front of the Vellore Municipal office. Viswanathan was the District Secretary of the AIADMK. The next morning he was arrested along with his son Shankar and imprisoned in Vellore Central Prison, where he remained for five day. Similarly between 1989 and 1990, Viswanathan was arrested five times.

The Karunanidhi Government had problem with the Centre when Chandrasekar became the Prime Minister. The Government was dismissed for antinational activities, the deteriorating law and order situation, and aiding and abetting the LTTE. The general election took place and Viswanathan got the opportunity to contest from the Arcot Constituency. Jayalalitha had forged an alliance with the Congress. On 21st May 1991 Viswanathan who was campaigning in a remote village had reached his camp around midnight when a messenger informed him that Rajiv Gandhi had been assassinated by a women suicide bomber at Sriperumbudur. Viswanathan won the Arcot seat by a margin of 14,273 votes defeating T.R. Gajapathi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

Ms. Jayalalitha became the Chief Minister Viswanathan was not included in the Cabinet. Instead, Indira Kumari from North Arcot District was appointed as Minister for Social Welfare. These months late, when he was in the office of the Tamil Weekly. "Tughlak" the editor Mr. Cho Ramaswamy got a phone call informing him that Viswanathan had been inducted to the Cabinet and Cho Ramaswamy told this news to Viswanathan.

Viswanathan was sworn in as the Minister for Food and Cooperation by Governor Bhima Naryan Singh. During his tenure as the Minister and the District Secretary, he organized a grand meeting in Ranipet where he presented a lion club to the Chief Minister

Ms. Jayalalitha. The Food Ministry was a highly sensitive portfolio he set himself to the task, of improving the efficiency of the various departments in his charge. He also had an ambitious plan of trying to remove corruption at various levels in the public relation distribution.

In 1993 when P.V. Narasimha Rao became the Prime Minister, A.K. Antony became the minister of Food and Public Distribution. At a conference of Food Ministers at Delhi, Antony announced his intention to set up a three member committee to revamp the public distribution system and named Viswanathan as the Chairman of the committee along with two other Ministers. Narendranath Dev from west Bengal and Mahendra Pratap Singh from Haryana, as members. During the meeting Anthony sent a slip of paper to Viswanathan asking him whether he would be the chairman. When Viswanathan gave his consent, Antony proceeded to make the announcement. The media was quick to flash the news. Perhaps Jayalalitha was angered because she was not intimated in advance. When Viswanathan returned to Madras, he called on her and informed her of the developments at the Conference. Viswanathan was removed from the Cabinet on 16th May 1993.

Vaiko had launched the Marunmalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) in 1993. A large number of youngsters joined him. Though he exodus of youthful workers considerably weakened the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the MDMK failed made any waves in Tamil Nadu politics. Viswanathan and the friends Mr. S.R. Radha Azhgu Thirunavukkarasu decided to join the MDMK in 1995.

In the meantime Viswanathan had parted ways with the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhaga. Soon thereafter elections were declared. In the election of Lok Sabha held in February that year the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam won all the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu as well as the lone seat in neighboring Pondicherry. The election to the State Assembly was held in May 1996 which marked the end of Viswanathan's political career. He contacted from the Gudiyatham constituency as an independent candidate but did not win. In that election the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam candidate V.G. Dhanapal, defeated his Congress opponent by a margin of over 29,000 votes, while Viswanathan and all other Candidates lost their deposits. The DMK returned to power with a massive mandate. The AIADMK was routed and Jayalalitha herself lost the election from the Bargur constituency.

He decided to retire from political life. He had spent more than three decades in active politics from the 1967 election victor to the 1996 election defeat driven by a desire to serve the people and to contribute to the growth of the nation. He had no selfish personal agendas. Once he funned his back on politics he devoted himself to education and never looked back.

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