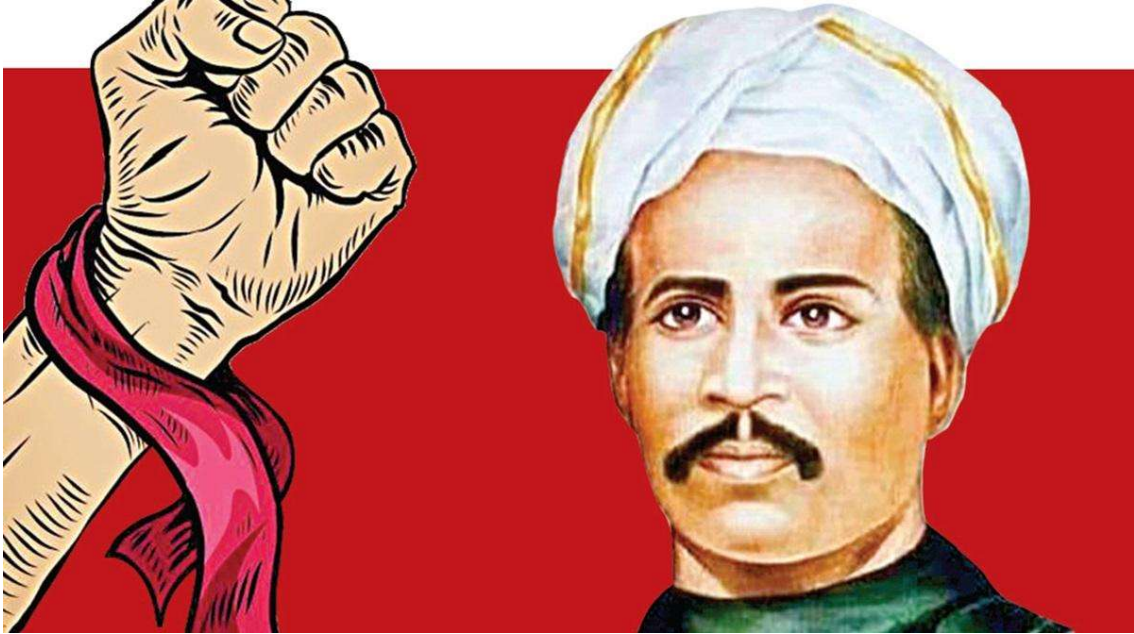


Singaravelar: Lessons left unlearnt



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In Indian politics, the 1920s were marked by several important events. The decade had witnessed Mahatma Gandhi's advent in the freedom struggle, Ambedkar's return home from his higher studies in the European institutions, Periyar's launch of the self-respect movement after quitting the Congress, the birth of the RSS, a Hindutva organization and the emergence of the Indian Communist parties. Thus, events of various ideological significance took place in the historic decade.

It was during this period that disparate doctrines such as Dravidianism, Dalit ideology, Hindutva and Communism began taking an organizational and structural shape. Yet, it was Communism which faced a heavier and sterner crackdown at the hands of the then British government.

The socialist revolution led by Lenin in Russia in 1917 got Communism and Marxism spreading far and wide globally. Fearing the propagation of the Red ideologies in India, both European capitalism and the British government had girded up their loins to stem the tide.

First Communist in South India

At a time when the proponents of Communism were tortured and imprisoned in cases such as Meerut conspiracy and Peshawar conspiracy, it was comrade Singaravelar, who spoke the following words at the session of the Indian National Congress held at Gaya in 1922, declaring himself a Communist: “Workers and farmers! Today I stand before you to speak as one of your co-workers. I have come here as a representative of a great movement interested in world welfare in the order of distinguished world Communists. I have come here to deliver the message, sublime and dignified, given out by Communism.” Moreover, comrade Singaravelar delivered the presidential address at the first Communist conference held in Kanpur in 1925.

In the beginning, he was a hardcore Congressman working under the leadership of Gandhi in various agitations such as the non-cooperation movement. But he came under the influence of Marxism following the 1917 Russian revolution. It was Comrade Singaravelar, hailed as the First Communist in South India, who conducted the May Day rally for the first time in India. He launched the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan and led several labour strikes, also giving consultations over many struggles.

The Erode pathway

Following his friendship with Periyar, comrade Singaravelar agreed to write articles about egalitarianism and socialism in the self-respect movement’s journal ‘Kudiyarasu’. They planned to float the ‘Self-Respect Socialist Party’ to capture political power in order to accentuate the ongoing propagation of socialist principles among the

people through the political agenda called 'Erottup Paadhai' (Erode Pathway). However, in the wake of the British repressive measures, Periyar shed his campaign for socialist ideology. The spark of socialist principles, ignited by comrade Singaravelar, though, turned into a conflagration among the Tamil youth.

The comrades of self-respect and socialism, who were dissatisfied over Periyar's decision to give up on the socialist campaign, established the Socialist Party in 1936, in which renowned communist leader P. Jeevanantham served as general secretary.

Comrade Singaravelar used the monthly magazine 'Pudhu Ulagam' (New World) launched in 1935 as a vehicle of expression for propagating his socialist philosophy among the people. When the Communist Party was banned in 1932, his socialist propagation and campaign played a vital role in the latter-day functioning of the Communist Party.

Missed bus

Comrade Singaravelar was unique among the initial leaders of the Indian Communist Party. The Indian Communist leaders, till 1990s, had studied the Indian society from the economic perspective involving classes. They had formulated their own action programme based on the findings of the study. But, they had failed to factor in caste, the main and unique phenomenon in Indian society, in their study. As a result, the Communist leaders had suffered a setback, alienated from the oppressed workers' community.

It was only after 70 years that the Communist movement, launched in India in the 1920s, took caste, the primary ironical factor in the country, as the basis of its social analysis. But comrade Singaravelar, during the period itself, launched campaigns against the cruelties of caste and inequalities too while propagating socialist ideology.

The Indian Communist movements are now facing the adverse consequences of their failure to learn lessons from Singaravelar.

There is no iota of doubt that if the political 'Erode Pathway' plan, conceived of by Singaravelar along with Periyar to create an egalitarian socialist society cleansed of caste, the social menace, had been executed seamlessly and tirelessly, Singaravelar would have become the political beacon for the Indian Communist movements.

Translated by V. Mariappan.