

Lenin in the eyes of Tamil Nadu



Tamil Kamarasan, researcher and publisher. For contact: tamilkamarajan@gmail.com

Lenin (1870-1924), one of the nonpareil leaders of people and also one of the philosophical ideologues of the matchless Communist movement, was 10 years younger than M. Singaravelu (1860-1948), the first Communist in the then South India. Lenin was a senior by nine years to Periyar E. V. Ramasamy (1879-1973). Compared to both, Lenin lived for a shorter period of time, that is, 54 years. He dedicated half his life to the Russian labourers' movement.

Workers' movement

Back in the day, the dictatorial rule of Tsar king weighed the people down in Russia. So, in order to eliminate the Tsar reign, the Russian 'democrats' movement spearheaded by the people from various classes ranging from nobles to peasants was waging a theoretical battle against the concept of monarchy and also the dominance of the

Catholic Church which supported the emperor. The movement tried to mobilise the farmers in its fight against the establishment. A section of the members tried to assassinate the Tsar king and thereby abolish the family rule. As part of their efforts, a conspiracy was hatched then. Lenin's elder brother Alexander took part in the plot and later was hanged.

Lenin had inherited his brother's ideals, but did not follow him in his footsteps and rather adopted the methods of the labour movement which was a new found rage in Europe. However, unlike in Europe, there was no massive workforce nor industrial progress in Russia. They were just coming up then. The Russian democrats were influenced by the ideologies of the European labour movement and took them to the workers. Lenin immersed in the labour movement and gave a definitive shape to the movement.

Way to revolution

Karl Marx's book 'Capital' (1st volume) was published in 1867, whose Russian translation came out in 1872. While the original German version witnessed a sale of just 1,000 copies within five years, the Russian book's 3,000 copies sold out within a year. This took Marx himself by surprise. The Russian democratic movement had been quite active that much and became a new revolutionary movement strengthened by the participation of a strong labour force. At the same time, an endless battle of ideas and theories was vigorously going on. In the philosophical battles, Lenin stood front and centre, attracting all around, showing his intellectual acumen. He wrote lots of explanatory and discourse pamphlets, espousing and focussing on the cause of the welfare of labourers and people. Generally the Russian Marxists viewed the abolition of the Tsar rule as a democratic agenda and the establishment of workers' political power as a socialist agenda. Yet Lenin emphasised the symbiotic kinship between these two agendas. The minority races and the various races of the people considered liberation as linked to the revolution. In this way, the labourers, farmers, other sections of the workers, the national races subjected to suppression and various social groups were insisting on unity among themselves. Lenin expanded the existing slogan 'Let workers of all countries unite' to 'Let all suppressed countries unite.'

Lenin framed ideologies about the imperialist era, party and revolution. He also played an immense role in redeeming and expanding the principles of Marx-Engels about religion, government and et al. Lenin's elucidatory books on philosophy are the treasures of the world of knowledge. Above all, his leadership in triggering the Russian Revolution and helming the post-revolution government is nonpareil. It was he, who had fulfilled all requirements of a revolution.

Lenin in Tamil Nadu

Initially Lenin expected a warm reception to the 1917 Revolution from the European labour parties. But his expectations were belied for the European labour movement kept discussing the questions of whether the workers' revolution was possible in a backward Russia, whether the revolution could be that of workers and whether the revolution would lead to socialism. Yet all the same, Lenin's anti-imperialist ideology and support for the liberation of the people in colony countries made him popular in the colonial world. In this respect, the very name of Lenin became a rage in Tamil Nadu back in the day.

Since the 1905 Revolution, Lenin's name had often figured in the world of Tamil journalism. Bharathi wrote a lot about Lenin in the Tamil journals. Some other writings too came out revolving around Lenin (Raghunathan, 1977). The latter-day communists celebrated these writings. However, these writings were confined to celebration of Lenin as 'a liberation warrior who overthrew the dictatorial monarchy'. They discussed and refuted Lenin's ideologies about social-economic socialism. They tried to link the notions of violence in social change with the principle of ahimsa and the ideas of property confiscation with the ideology of making properties 'common' which is the source of the trusteeship principle ("Thamizhagam Kanta Lenin' - Lenin that Tamil Nadu witnessed).

The writings in the journal 'Kudiarasu' and the activities of the Self-Respect Movement were overlooked by the Tamil Communist researchers who studied the writings about the Russian Revolution in Tamil journals. It was S. V. Rajadurai who has made up for this omission through his writings examining Periyar. The writings in 'Kudiarasu' tried to portray the Russian Revolution from a

wholesome perspective. They were fruits of a thinking that tried to link the revolution with the Indian-Tamilian social change activities. It is noteworthy that no other person has done this kind of thinking but M. Singaravelu and Periyar. Subsequently Periyar published in Tamil the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Portrayals of Lenin

The publications of Tamil writings about Lenin and about the leader's writings have not been systematically collected and researched. If they were examined, how Lenin and his writings had impacted the Tamil world of knowledge could be assessed and understood properly.

Going by the early Tamil publications about Lenin, there are two kinds of portrayal of Lenin in the world of Tamil intellectual culture. In a nationalistic portrayal, Lenin was viewed as a liberation warrior who overthrew the dictatorial government. In a self-respect movement-oriented portrayal, he was seen as a freedom warrior who took on the dominating religion which supported all kinds of social-economic inequality. Lenin's writings were translated into Tamil as part of a caste elimination agenda. This initiative could be viewed as part of efforts to 'Tamilize' Marxism. Which one of the portrayals of Lenin could be accepted by the Communists would be a constructive question.

January 21 marks completion of Lenin's death centenary

Translated by V. Mariappan.