

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION SCHEME OF RAJAJI AND THE AGITATION OF DMK

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INTRODUCTION

The Modified Scheme of Elementary Education or New Scheme of Elementary Education was an abortive attempt at education reform introduced by the Rajaji the than chief minister of the madras state in 1953. The scheme proposed the introduction of two shifts in elementary schools. In one session regular teaching would be done and during the second session, the students would be sent home to learn the occupations of their parents. It became controversial and was accused of being a cattiest scheme to perpetuate the caste hierarchy as Hindu Professions were caste based. The opposition to the scheme was led by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Public opposition and internal dissent within the congress led to the deferment of the scheme. The discontent it triggered among the Congress legislature members forced the resignation of Rajaji as Chief Minister the scheme was dropped completely by Rajaji's successor Kamaraj in 1954

When rajaji assumed power in 1952, the literacy rate in the Madras State was 20.86% During fiscal year 1950-51, the Madras State Government spent 6.87 core Rupees about 11.5% of total revenues for the state for Elementary education. The enrollment rate for children of school- going age was around 47.8% the Directive Principle of the Indian Constitution require the Indian state to provide education to all citizens. In accordance to this directive, in 1950 the Madras State's Directorate of public Instruction prepared a ten-year plan to provide education to all children of school-going age. This plan called for an allocation of one core Rupees per year for enrolling 50000 additional students for the next ten years.

EARLIER ATTEMPTS AT CHANGE:

In 1939, during Rajaji's first term as Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency, girls students of standards III to V and those belonging to Scheduled Cates had been allowed to attend school for only three hours a day and spend the rest of the day helping their parents. In the academic year 1949-50, during the Chief Minister ship of P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, an experimental shift system had been introduced in ten taluks and later expanded to other areas as optional measure. Schools which adapted this system functioned in two shifts or sessions.

Teachers who worked during both sessions were paid an additional allowance of 10 Rupees per month. However this system was not widely adopted and by 1951 only 155 elementary schools (out of a total 38,687) in the state were functioning in shifts³.

CAUSES

The cost of educating all children in the 6-12 age groups would be enormous. Besides enrollment. More than half of the elementary schools lacked proper infrastructure. The reform attempted to increase the number of school-going children within the financial limitations faced by the Government. There was an acute shortage of teachers. The state had an average of less than three teachers for five standards per school. There were 4,108 single -teacher schools and more than 60 % of the schools with five standards had less than four teachers⁴ This poor student-teacher ratio was putting a strain on the teachers and led to students being made to stay in school for longer hours. This directly contributed to the high dropout ratio. This plural teaching had to stopped without hiring new teachers⁵ Rajaji favored Gandhi's Basic Education Scheme over the existing elementary education system. He stated that he wanted to reduce the unemployment amongst educated people⁶. The Basic education system called for learning through living and training in self-reliance. The retention rate of 37% had to be improved by making schools attractive to students of poorer sections⁸.

PROPOSALS

Reduction of Schools hours from five hours per day to three. Introduction of shift the students were to be divided into two batches and the school would function in two sessions. Each session will be of three hours duration. During the out of school session, the girl students were to learn housekeeping from their mothers in their home environment. The boys were supposed to learn farming or other crafts from their respective fathers. Boys, whose parents did not belong to occupational groups, were to be sent to work in farms or with other craftsmen in their villages. In addition to the learning the students were to be utilized in service to the village like building sheds, laying bricks, attending to village sanitation, improving roads, etc., The Rajaji Government introduced the new elementary education scheme in all schools in the non-municipal (rural) areas for the academic year 1953-54.

OPPOSITION

It was planned that eventually the scheme would be extended to 35,000 of the total 38,687 schools in the state. However due to public opposition, it was put on hold on 29 July 1953 and dropped altogether on 18 May 1954⁹. From the beginning, the scheme attracted heavy opposition from the Dravidar Kazhagam and organized a conference in Erode protesting the scheme's introduction¹⁰. The teachers' unions also opposed their move as they were not consulted before implementation. They also resented the increase in working hours without any increase in pay¹¹. The DMK seized the opportunity and started a campaign against the scheme. They dubbed the scheme as the *Kula kalvi thittam* (Hereditary/ Caste Education Scheme) and as the *Acharyar Education Scheme*¹². The Dravidian movement viewed the scheme as an attempt to

preserve and perpetuate caste based discrimination through official means. They used Rajaji's notions about caste and village craftsmen to depict the scheme as a "Brahmins conspiracy". Rajaji had earlier expressed his opinion about castes and crafts as:

The food is grown, the cloth is woven, the sheep are shorn, the shoes are stitched, the scavenging is done, the cartwheels and the ploughs are built and repaired because, thank God, the respective castes are still there and the homes are trade schools as well and the parents are masters as well, to whom the children are automatically apprenticed¹³.

Rajaji and his education minister MV Krishna Rao responded with a counter campaign in the scheme's defense. They gave speeches and made broadcasts in the All India Radio explaining their position¹⁴. The month of June 1953 saw aggressive propaganda efforts by both the proponents and opponents of the scheme. On 13 July 1953, the DMK executive committee met and decided to conduct a marital (blockade) agitation outside the Chief Minister's residence. EVK Sampath was nominated to lead the agitation. This agitation was part of a three pronged attack on the Government's policies by the DMK. On 14 July 1953, a procession led by Satyavani Muthu was organized to protest the scheme. Its destination was Rajaji's official residence at Bazullah road, T.Nagar. it was stopped by the police as it was unlicensed. The next day the confrontation heated up with the Government introducing a motion in the Legislative Assembly for implementing the scheme from the academic year 1953-54. On the same day another DMK procession was stopped before it could reach T Nagar. In the next fifteen days as many as twenty such processions were attempted by the DMK.

DEFERMENT

By the end of July, public opinion started to turn against the scheme and at least four public petitions were tabled in the Legislative Assembly about the scheme¹⁵. On 29 July 1953, M.V Krishna Rao, the Minister for Education moved a motion for considering the new scheme. After a discussion, Communist leader K.P Gopalan moved a motion to drop the scheme. The house was deadlocked with 138 ayes to 138 nose on dropping the scheme. The speaker of the assembly J.Shivashanmugam Pillai used his casting vote to defeat the motion. A second motion to defer the scheme and refer it to a committee of experts was moved by K.R Viswanatham. This motion passed with 138 ayes against 137 nose. The Scheme was stayed¹⁶ and the Parulekar Committee was commissioned to review the scheme.

PARULEKAR COMMITTEE

On 20 August 1953, the Government constitute a committee of experts for reviewing the scheme. The committee was composed of Prof.RV. Parulekar, Director of Indian Institute of Education Bombay, as the Chairman; Dr.B.B.Dey, Retired Director of Public Instruction, Madras; Prof.Mohammad Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of the Jamia Millia University as members and S.Govindarajula Naidu, the former Director of Public Instruction, Madras, and the then Director of Public Instruction, Andhra Pradesh, as the Member Secretary. The Parulekar committee submitted its report on 23 November 1953. It found the scheme to be sound and endorsed the Government's position. It made additional recommendations including extending the scheme to rural areas, opening as many as 4000 new schools, revising the existing curriculum, providing training and remuneration to the craftsmen involved¹⁷.

CANCELLATION

The opposition campaign was successful in creating doubts about the scheme in the minds of the general public. There was dissent within the Congress party and kamaraj wanted Rajaji to withdraw the scheme as it was unpopular amongst the public and with the party members. On 20 October 1953, forty Congress Legislative Assembly members led by P.Varatharajulu Naidu, sent a memorandum to Nehru objecting to Rajaji's unilateral conduct. Among the issues they raised was his refusal to budge on the education scheme issue. But Rajaji refused to drop the scheme. On 8 November 1953, Congress pressure mounted from within the party to drop the scheme. On 9 March 1954, Congress leader and former Chief Minister O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiyar made an open appeal to Rajaji in the legislature.

CONCLUSION

Please give up the scheme without any more ado. It is a new handle to the Blackshirts [Dravidar Kazhagam]. Persistence will sound only the death knell of the party. But Rajaji did not relent and his Education Minister C Subramaniam upped the ante by announcing that the scheme would be extended to urban areas in June 1954. This spurred the Congress Legislators into open revolt. They scheduled a meeting of the Congress Legislative Party on 21 March. Faced with certain defeat in the leadership election that was bound to happen in that meeting, Rajaji tried a last minute compromise-he would quit if C.Subramaniam was chosen as his successor and the scheme was kept. But Kamaraj the leader of the anti-Rajaji camp, refused to accept the deal. The meeting was postponed by a week and when it happened on March 31, C.Subramaniam was defeated by Kamaraj. Rajaji resigned and Kamaraj took over as Chief Minister on 13 April 1954. This effectively ended the prospects of the new education scheme. On 18 May 1954, C.Subramaniam announced in the assembly that the scheme was being dropped. The reason stated for the dropping was that the necessary acceptance, support and cooperation of the people were not forthcoming for the scheme and the atmosphere was not propitious for the success of the scheme.

END NOTES

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