Chapter - IV
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NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT AND JUSTICE PARTY

The rise and growth of non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu was the outcome of the existing peculiar socio-political situation and a variety of factors at work in the Madras Presidency. The movement was aimed at securing proportionate representation for the majority of the people in the educational institutions and governmental positions.

During the second half of the nineteenth century political awakening became possible due to the impacts of western education. It led to the organization of a number of political associations. Having merged with the national movement under the initiative of the INC by the close of the century, the political aspirations of the elite section consolidated itself. However, owing to the prevailing disparities in the socio-economic structure of the society, the educated middle class professionals and businessmen found the doors of the Congress closed to them with a dominant and powerful Brahmin group. This made them focus their attention to the social emancipation of non-Brahmins as a prelude to the attainment of political rights. These developments culminated in the progress of a parallel political movement with the objective of removing social inequalities.

Political Awakening

The political awakening in Tamil Nadu came to be organized due to a variety of factors at work in the State from a very long period. Madras, the premier city of South India and capital of the Presidency, emerged as the meeting ground of different cultures. The activities of missionaries, spread of English education and the influence of western political thoughts contributed much for this development. The Charter Act of 1813 granted unrestricted entry of the Christian missionaries. The missionaries spread their activities to the
nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. It is said that often the meeting of the missionaries were held at district headquarters under the patronage of the collectors. It led to a large scale conversion of people from the depressed section of the Hindus to Christianity. The conversion of several of the socially segregated people made them read many literatures and ridiculed the Hindu superstitions, social practices and political injustices. Secondly, Lord Mecaulay introduced the English education in India, 1833. His purpose was two-fold. The first was to secure a cheap supply of Indians knowing English to serve the British Government in India. His second purpose was that it would foster among the educated Indians a sense of loyalty towards British rule in India and also result in the spread of western culture in India. Accordingly, the English education spread in India fairly well. It gave opportunities to the youth to enter government services and also the new professions of law, teaching and medicine. The English language promoted communication between the people of different regions of British India. In Madras, the mingling of the Tamils, the Malayalis, the Telugus and the Canarese (kannadigas) contributed to cultural and religious affinity. Indeed, the English education helped cut across the linguistic barriers and served as lingua-franca – a common, all-India language for people speaking different languages in British India. It created conspicuous social awareness in the Tamil Country.

Formation of Early Associations

The introduction of western education and the spread of missionary activities were viewed with disfavour by the caste Hindu population in Tamil

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Nadu. The Christian missionaries started many charitable organizations at lower level. Indeed, the activities of the missionaries created jealousy among the professional middle class who induced the religious sentiments of the Hindu merchants. As a beginning in this endeavour an educational endowment was created by Pachayappa Mudaliar. In 1842 some businessmen founded the Pachayappa School in Madras which later became the Pachayappa College as an alternative to the mission schools which multiplied in number. In 1844 Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty, a Telugu speaking rich merchant of Madras published a newspaper called Crescent to safeguard the rights and privileges of the Hindu community. The Brahmins who disliked the English education and the western thoughts in the beginning, changed their policy and became masters in English. They kept their numerical strength in the appointments of the Government in the Presidency College in Madras which was established in 1851. The native traders, though disliked the East India Company and its renewal of charters, considered the Company’s activities as a blessing in disguise for them. It gave a golden opportunity to them to pressurize the Parliament for removing some of its unfavourable features. With the suggestion of the British Indian Association of Calcutta, the merchants of Madras under the inspiration taken by Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty formed a local branch of the association in February 1852. After six months, the Association became an independent body known as the


8. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Madras Presidency founded the Madras High School in 1841 which a decade later developed into the Presidency College of Madras. (Muthusamy Pillai, S., *Neethi Katchi Varalaru* (History of Justice Party), (Tamil), Madras, 1985, pp.3-6).

Madras Native Association (MNA) in 1852. The Charter Act of 1853 did not solve the grievances of the non-Brahmins in the revenue, judicial and educational matters. Yet the MNA determined in its stand to amend the tax system and curb missionary activities. With the transfer of the administration from the East India Company to the British Crown in 1858 the Association’s major demand was fulfilled. In July 1862, it became ‘practically defunct.’

The Role of the Press

The press was considered as the ‘Fourth Estate’. It served as a powerful organ by safeguarding the public opinion and published their grievances for the attention of the Government. The mid-eighteenth century witnessed the rise of several newspapers in India. In 1858 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar founded the Som Prakash. The Times of India was founded in Bombay in 1861. The Pioneer was founded in Allahabad in 1865. In 1868 Madras Mail and the Amrita Bazaar Patrika were established in Madras and Bengal respectively. The Statesman in Calcutta came into existence in 1875. In 1876 the Civil and Military Gazette was established at Lahore. In 1878 The Hindu was published from Madras. The Bengali was published in Calcutta in 1879 and the Tribune at Lahore in 1881. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the powerful revolutionary papers like the Kesari, the Yuguntar and the Bandematram appeared. The periodicals like Indian Social Reformer, the Hindu Review and the Indian Review also came into being.


12. The death of Laksminarasu Chetty in 1868 was a shattering blow. By 1881, the MNA was completely gone out of existence. (Suntharalingam, R., op.cit., p.251.)

Madras Mahajana Sabha

The vested interest in press activities infused political awakening and jealousy over the missionary activities. The patrons of Hinduism started a political association on 16 May 1884 known as the Madras Mahajana Sabha. The members of the Madras Native Association (MNA) joined it and boosted the activities the Hindu professional class to a greater extent. Its members were mostly lawyers who slowly outnumbered the merchants. The western educated Brahmins mostly dominated in this Association. It was the provincial pioneer of the INC. Men from these and similar associations, namely British Indian Association of Calcutta, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha grouped together and formed the INC.

INC held its first meeting in 1885 in Bombay. Thereafter, annual conferences were held between twentieth and thirtieth of every year. Nineteen delegates from Madras region participated its first session at Bombay. In 1887, the Congress commenced its third session in Madras. The formation of a Provincial Congress Committee for the Presidency did not lead to the total dismay of the Madras Mahajana Sabha. In 1894 it was affiliated to the Madras City District Congress committee to function as an influential body complementing the activities of the local Congress. Yet it continued to maintain its identity. The fourteenth session of the Indian National Congress was held in Madras during 1898 which happened to be the third of its kind to be held in Madras. M. Subba Row Pantulu emphasized the need for securing

socio-economic equality and concessions to the oppressed and suppressed and placed a proposal to the Government in the welcome address of the Congress. However in all these conferences the Depressed Class members were not given representation.

The Rise of Non-Brahmin Movement

Though there were both non-Brahmins and Brahmins in the mainstream of the nationalist movement, the Brahmins influenced the rest in the political, social and educational fields. It led to the monopoly of the western education of the Brahmins in the Madras Presidency. Until 1894 the Madras Presidency created 1900 Tamil graduates. Among them, the Brahmins of Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Chengleput and Tiruchirapalli predominated. The non-Brahmins constituted only a fifth of the graduates. It led to social disparities among them in Tamil Nadu. Although the Brahmins constituted 3.3% in the Presidency, they wielded great social and economic influence over and above their numerical strength. The Brahmins also claimed ritual supremacy in the Hindu society. It put them in the fountain of power in Tamil Nadu. As the educated class of the society, they served as clerks, accountants, administrators and officials. They were also awarded land rights as mirasidars and inamidars in recognition of their religious and secular services. Though they had lands they diverted themselves from the process of agricultural production. They considered ploughing as a ritually polluting act. Therefore for that service they appointed non-Brahmins and Depressed classes. But in due course they began to sell their lands and went to the urban regions for higher occupations. The rapid spread of education created a surplus of graduates. As a consequence new fields in education began to appear. It led the non-Brahmins to have conflict with the Brahmins who were the European professionals. The knowledge of Sanskrit and traditional Hindu laws made the Brahmin lawyers to


seclude the British from intermingling with the non-Brahmins. It created a ground for agitation for the non-Brahmins against the European professionals in Tamil Nadu.  

Since 1880 the discontented non-Brahmins and Depressed classes started various organizations which represented cultural, religious, social and political character of the Dravidians. In the cultural field, in 1883 a Saiva Siddhanta Sabha was founded at Tuticorin, followed by another one at Palayamkottai in 1886. The Sabha attempted to show the Dravidian religious system as superior and distinctive from the teachings of the Vedas of Brahmins. The founding of Madurai Tamil Sangam by Pandithurai Thevar in 1901, symbolized the climax of cultural progress. Meanwhile, communal bodies too came to be started. The early associations of the Depressed Classes insisted on the social equality. In the political field, various movements and organizations appeared until the formation of political parties for the non-Brahmins. The international developments too had their impact. During 1904-1905 the Russo-Japanese war took place which kindled the youthful imagination of the South Indian people. In February 1905 to commemorate the victory of Japan, a public meeting was held in Madras.  

Another development in India was the partition of Bengal in 1905. Though it did not create terrorism in Tamil Nadu to the scale of Maharastra, inspired by the Bengalis' enthusiasm for swadeshi, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, (V.O.C) a lawyer of Tuticorin formed a Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in November 1906 to break the monopoly of British steamers. The Christian missionaries also preached swadeshi at certain places. Swadeshi meetings were held in Tiruchirappalli,


Madurai, Thanjavur, Salem, Coimbatore and other areas.\(^{25}\) In 1907 Bipin Chandra Pal visited Madras and delivered fiery speeches which inspired the swadeshi movement. In May 1907 the mob wrecked a European club. In June of the same year several students boycotted and were punished by the Government. In July a police constable attacked his officer with a bayonet. In August another constable killed Bell, a British Officer.\(^{26}\) In February 1908 V.O.C. organised a strike at a British owned textile mill at Tuticorin. Subsequently, the caste-Hindus earned the enmity of both the European officials and their Indian counterparts especially the Brahmins. In March 1908 V.O.C. was prohibited from holding public meetings. As he defied the ban order, the police arrested him on 13 March 1908.\(^{27}\) As a consequence, the crowd attacked the municipal offices, post offices, police stations and the munsiff courts both at Tuticorin and Tirunelveli leading to police firing at the mob. These incidents were known as ‘Tirunelveli Rots’\(^{28}\) or ‘Tuticorin Riots’\(^{29}\) Enraged at these developments and political turmoil as a consequence of the arrest of V.O Chidambaram, Vanchi Iyer, a militant youth, shot dead Ashe, the Sub-Collector of Tuticorin in 1911 at Maniyachi Railway Station.\(^{30}\)


\(^{27}\) David Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.26


\(^{29}\) *Indian Express*, 3 September 1988.

\(^{30}\) *Swadesamitran, Madras*, 18 June 1911.
Though the spirit of Swadeshi Movement had widespread consequences, it gave birth to educational institutions which in turn encouraged the spread of Dravidian literature. In 1909 Minto- Morley reforms were introduced which gave a special representation and communal electorates to the Muslims. The Madras Landholders Association which was constituted of Brahmin influence opposed the 1909 reforms. But the non-Brahmins considered the 1909 Act as an opportunity to give pressure to the Government to grant more communal representation for them.

In the same year an attempt was made by two non-Brahmin lawyers – P.Subramaniyam and M.Purushotam Naidu to form an organization under the name of Madras non-Brahmin Association. It was distinctly non-political and non-aggressive. It was conceived purely as a social progressive organisation. Later, it was called the Madras Dravidian Association. The Association included every caste and race in the Presidency except the Brahmins. Yet this Association could not continue for long for want of good organisation. Undeterred by this discomfiture, a sizeable group of the non-Brahmins decided to establish an organization to voice their grievances and to secure a fair deal in the affairs of the Government. Accordingly, again in 1912 they started in Madras an association called the Madras United League. All the non-Brahmins were allowed to join the League. C.Natesa Mudaliar, a private doctor, became the Secretary of the Madras United League. In 1913, the League had a membership of 300 persons who were actively involved in different forms of adult education programmes such as conducting class in the evenings with


33. David Arnold, *op.cit.*, p.19


themselves acting as teachers. Subsequently, the Madras United League changed its name into the Madras Dravidian Association. This Association held regular meetings to discuss the problems relating to the non-Brahmins. Literary meetings were also arranged under its auspices. The Association also brought the non-Brahmin young graduates under one banner and made them an elite class. Besides, it infused the spirit of healthy rivalry against the Brahmins and created the spirit of self-respect among the non-Brahmins. Several of the leading non-Brahmin citizens of Madras city attended its annual gathering. In 1915 the non-Brahmins also published a book in Madras entitled ‘non-Brahmin Letters’, which contained twenty one letters. One of the letters suggested that a Dravida Maha Sabha should be formed in Madras city with branches in each district, taluk, town and village with the object of uplifting the Non-Brahmin community. In July 1916 the Madras Dravidian Association established a hostel for the non-Brahmins in Madras city. It gave accommodation to the college students who came from various districts without caste distinction. The hostel was called “Dravidian Home” which was maintained by C.Natesa Mudaliar. The Dravidian Home also had a Literary Society which benefited its dwellers. Though the establishment of Dravidian Home was a small attempt, it made the non-Brahmins to strengthen themselves in Madras city. The Madras Dravidian Association became very popular among the non-Brahmins. It attracted the attention of the non-Brahmin politicians like P.Thiagaraya Chetty and T.M.Nair who decided to make it a powerful political movement to voice the grievances of the non-Brahmins.

C.Natesa Mudaliar, a non-official service minded popular doctor of Triplicane started the Madras Dravidian Association on 10 November 1912. As secretary of the Association, he collected funds for the establishment of a


37 Majumdar, B.B., op.cit., p.259.

38 Nambi Arooran, K., op.cit., pp.42-44.
hostel in Madras city for non-Brahmin youths, who decided to study in the schools and colleges of Madras city. He established the Dravidian Association Hostel in June 1916. This hostel functioned as a centre to unite and organise the non-Brahmin youths.

The Dravidian Association published two books entitled Dravidian Worthies and Non-Brahmins. The latter is a series of twenty-one letters which brought to light the position and aspirations of the non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency. These letters contained the principles and goals of the Non-Brahmin Movement. The letters viewed that the non-Brahmins are disunited and instead of taking advantage of the English education and aspiring for official positions in Government service, remained attached to their traditional occupations as businessmen or dubashes and they must all organise a movement to unite the Dravidians. 39

Meanwhile, T.M. Nair, a doctor by profession was taking active part in the public life of Madras. P.Thiagaraya Chetty, a Telugu businessman was also equally an important public figure taking active interest in the public life of Madras. These two stalwarts had differences between them over a municipal problem of sewage disposal at Tondairpet in North Madras, where Thiagaraya Chetty lived. Natesa Mudaliar reconciled the differences and brought unity between these two notable figures in the city of Madras.40

The long-standing fear and suspicion of the emerging non-Brahmin elite towards the Brahmins became institutionalized when ‘Non-Brahmin gentlemen of position and influence both in Madras and in the Mofussil’ met at a conference at the Victoria Public Hall in Madras city on 20 November 1916. It resolved to take measures to “start a company for publishing a newspaper advocating the cause of the non-Brahmin community” and also to form a political association in order to “advance a safeguard and protect the


interests of the same community." Accordingly, a joint stock company was started under the name of ‘South Indian People’s Association for conducting a daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively. A political association was also formed under the nomenclature of ‘South Indian Liberal federation’ whose purpose was “to promote the political interests of non-Brahmin caste–Hindus”.

T.M. Nair realized the importance of the growing non-Brahmin movement, when he was defeated in the Triplicane constituency in 1916. The defeat served as a catalysing agent for the organisation of the non-Brahmin party. He joined hands with P. Thiagaraya Chetty and Raja of Panagal. For a while, Thiagaraya Chetty was a prominent member of the Madras Corporation, who organised the non-Brahmins. He was distressed at the state of large section of the non-Brahmin community in South. A highly educated and politically articulate leader, Thiagaraya Chetty, was a flourishing industrialist. He never failed to point out the role of Brahmin dominations in the Congress Party.

The Non-Brahmin and Home Rule Movements

During and after 1916 there was going on the struggle for strength more vigorously between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins in an increasing measure. It had further emerged as an anti-Brahmin political entity which had a chequered long history. In September 1916 Annie Besant formed the Home

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41. Rajaraman, P., *op. cit*, pp.77-78.


Rule League.\textsuperscript{47} Its birth coincided with hectic activities connected with the non-Brahmin movement.\textsuperscript{48} The Home Rule League established sixty-three branches in Tamil Nadu with many more in the Madras Presidency. The motto of the League was self-rule for the Indians.\textsuperscript{49} To get Home Rule, Annie Besant and her associates, Arundale, the orgainsing secretary and B.P.Wadia and C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar, the secretaries launched an agitation in Madurai. In supporting it, the workers of Harvey Mills went on strike. Foreign goods were boycotted. Indian made Swadeshi goods came to be used on a large scale.\textsuperscript{50} Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras could not contain the agitation and as a consequence he undertook measures to arrest Annie Besant and her associates. In June 1917 the police arrested Annie Besant and other home rule leaders and interned them at Nilgris.\textsuperscript{51} The arrest of Annie Besant raised her stature as a national hero and boosted the sale of \textbf{New India}. The League membership shot up from 7,000 in March 1917 to 27,000 in December 1917. Gandhi thought that the arrest of Annie Besant was an opportunity for the Congress to force the Government to release the prisoners. V.S.Srinivasa Sastri advised the Madras Pradesh Congress Committee not to take any steps until constitutional means of winning her release had been exhausted.\textsuperscript{52} Montagu, the Secretary of State

\textsuperscript{46} Annie Besant was an Irish lady and a veteran Congress leader. She organized the Madras Hindu Association in January 1904. In 1907 she became the president of the Theosophical Society.

\textsuperscript{47} Home Rule League, Proceedings of the first meeting of the Executive Council, Madras, 8 October 1919.


\textsuperscript{49} David Arnold, \textit{op.cit.}, p.24.

\textsuperscript{50} FNR, 18 May 1918.


persuaded the Madras Government to release Annie Besant in September 1917. Soon after her release, her stature was elevated from her provincial activities to the national level. She became the president of the Congress at Calcutta in December 1917. She was the last non-Indian to hold such a post. However, her League began to fade away, for her subscribers were mere followers and not those of sacrificial nature for the cause of Home Rule.

**Formation of Justice Party**

The non-Brahmins felt that the activities of the Home Rule Movement in the event of reforms would result in the entrenchment of Brahmins in the administration of the Madras Presidency. It made the non-Brahmin leaders to feel that there was great need among them to unite and counter act Annie Besant’s Home Rule Movement than ever before. Accordingly some prominent non-Brahmin leaders started the newspapers, the *Justice*, the *Dravidian* and *Andhra Prakasika* in English, Tamil and Telugu respectively, to propagate their ideals. In December 1916 P. Thiagaraya Chettiar issued a manifesto. It defined the attitude of the non-Brahmin communities towards the Home Rule Movement. It surveyed the condition of the non-Brahmins and pointed out direction for progress. According to the manifesto, firstly, it was stated that the non-Brahmins formed forty to forty and a half per cent of the population, but remained without political influence. Secondly, it advocated the need of the revision of the Indian constitution, to grant autonomy and legislative freedom. Thirdly, it liked progressive political development towards self-government. Fourthly, it considered the Home Rule as an extreme claim and unsuitable one to the existing conditions. Fifthly, it desired that the

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post-war scheme of reforms should give communal representation to the non-Brahmins. On March 1917 at a meeting held in Madras, T.M.Nair voiced that Home Rule could not be achieved at one bound and as a step towards it the Legislative Council should be enlarged in such a way as to provide training for people from different castes.

The South Indian People Association was named the South Indian Liberal Federation. In due course it came to be popularly known as Justice Party after the name of its English daily Justice. The objectives of the Justice Party were embodied in a constitution issued in 1917. They were

a. to create and promote the educational, social, economic, political, material and moral progress of all communities in South India other than the Brahmins.

b. to discuss public questions and to make a true and timely representation to the Government of the views and interests of the people of South India with the object of safeguarding and promoting the interests of all communities other than the Brahmins and

c. to disseminate by public lectures, by distribution of literature and by other means, sound and liberal views in regard to public opinion.

Propaganda Warfare

Soon after the formation of Justice Party, its urgent need became one of propagating its ideals among the people. At the beginning they turned towards newspaper media by writing articles and issuing statements. It led to the exchange of hot words in the press media. Generally the pro-non-Brahmin

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58. The Hindu, 20 December 1916.

59. Madras Mail, 18 October 1917.
news media felt that the granting of self government would lead to perpetuation of Brahmin power in the country and hence they stood for privileges of the non-Brahmin community. The pro-Brahmin press media struggled for its existence in the provincial level though it had vast scope in the national level. Both the pro and anti-non-Brahmin press media made their fight intensively on grounds of communal representation, home rule, language issue and on council entry.

The non-Brahmins, for their cause had three main newspapers. T.M.Nair served as the editor and publisher for Justice. The charge of Dravidian was taken over by Bakthavachalam Pillai and Viswapathi Chettiar. Its popularity soon reduced the sale of New India. The Justicites attacked the Home Rule Movement, the Swarajist policy and Congress movement through their press columns. They argued that Home Rule movement was a Brahmin movement. They also openly attacked that the Congress leaders who more or less came from Brahmin community. Instead of Dravidian language the choice of Sanskrit or Devanagari script was considered as an imposition of Brahminism. The Justicites attacked New India and ridiculed its editor as an Irish Brahmin and as a leader of the Madras Brahmins.

The Dravidian was known for its ideological differences with the Home Rule League. It stated that “the meeting of the Home Rule league in different parts of India forbade danger. If the Government was remaining quiet, they would be suffering for it afterwards”. Further, it requested the Government that the “Home Rule League should be condemned as unconstitutional and wondered how many people declared that they were permanent members of the League.” It observed that “their heroism and their willingness to sacrifice their

60. The Hindu, 22 December 1916.


life could be tested at the time of incidents". The paper again warned that “if the Government failed to take severe action upon the Home Rule demanders, they could be rousing the ignorant and peaceful people of India against the Government”. The Dravidian also expressed that “Home rule can be granted to India only when all the Indians demanded it without distinction of caste and creed”. Furthermore, it portrayed that the English rule was indispensable for the progress of India and the British were rendering invaluable help to the forty million people of India. The Dravidian also observed that “the only administrative reform necessary for India was to enable people of all castes to have the same privilege under the Government. The reforms suggested by the South Indian Liberal Federation in their address to Montagu are all important ones and the people would not be satisfied unless all these are granted. The grant of anything more would do more harm than good to the country”. The Kudi Arasu of E.V.Ramasamy (EVR) defined communal representation as aimed at securing equal rights of all the citizens in a state and all the privileges of the state should be enjoyed by all communities without differentiation. The Tamilan protested against the grant of Home Rule to India. The paper viewed that “the granting of Home Rule would lead to the Brahmins getting all the power in their hands and teasing of the other classes”.

The Saiphul Islam and Darul Islam stood for the Muslim interests in the country, while in Tamil Nadu they worked for the uplift of Depressed Classes. Kudi Arasu worked for the promotion of the non-Brahmin


64. FNR for the second half of December 1916, letter no.168.


67. Kudi Arasu, 22 November 1925, p.11.

communities. Thennadu remarked that “the Depressed Classes could have their grievances redressed only by co-operating with their Hindu brethren and not with the nationalists”. The Malayalam magazines like Kerala Sanchari, Malayali and Keralodayam supported and propagated the non-Brahmins’ ideals and articles in their publications.

The important newspapers which spread the ideas of Home Rule Movement were Common Weal, New India, Swadesamitran, Desabhaktan, Lokopakari, Hindu Nesan and Vijaya Vikatan. They were of the firm view that the Home Rule agitation would be a stepping stone for the attainment of self-rule in India. Among the above newspapers Common Weal and New India were started by Annie Besant, leader of the Home Rule League. The New India described Justice Party as a “mischievous movement” and blamed it as an instrument for restricting the activities of the INC and Home Rule League. It condemned the movement as ‘unpatriotic’, ‘short-sighted’ and ‘narrow-minded’. The Lokopakari questioned the Government: “If Indians are unfit for Home Rule who is responsible for that”. Besides, the Home rulers criticized the manifesto of the non-Brahmins as communal and as a barrier to the attainment of Home Rule demand. The Andrapatrika observed that “Is it right to blame the Brahmins, on the other, the Kamma, the Reddi and the Kapu autocracy without taking into consideration the well being of the non-Brahmin community as a whole.”

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70. New India, 20 December 1916.

71. Ibid, 6 January 1917.


73. Swadesamitran, 17 October 1917, M.N.N.R., p.1114

74. Andhrapatrika, 12 September 1922.
The papers *Swadesamitran*, *Desabhandu* and *Tamil Nad* supported the stand of Swaraj or dominion status and stood for council entry. The newspaper *Tamilnad* once depicted that “Swaraj is our goal and our policy is to adopt the principle of non-violence and paralyse the bureaucracy in various ways ...... civil disobedience may be our last weapon and we should adopt it very soon. We cannot continue to be slaves for a long time”.\(^{75}\)

Papers like *Desabhimani*, *Navasakthi*, *Coliyan* and *Sukhodayam* supported the cause of nationalism. As a result they supported the Gandhian principles of non-violence and spread the ideas of non-co-operation. They criticized the regional groupism which demanded communal representation and council entry. *Navasakti* expressed the view that “there was no other means for the liberation of the country than the non-co-operation programme of Gandhi”.\(^{76}\) *Ananda Vijayan*, a monthly from Coimbatore remarked that “Justicites consider that they were the real patriots and would work for the progress of the country. But it was true that they could not do any benefit to the people.....”\(^{77}\)

The distinct interest of various political interests in Tamil Nadu created a kind of neutral news media. Majority of the Tamil papers like *Prapanchamitran*, irrespective of their communal affiliations supported the growth of awareness among the Depressed Classes. Generally these papers not only were concerned with political emancipation but also with social regeneration of the non-Brahmins. As they had flexible policy and change of tones according to the nature, situation and importance of events, they were neutral in supporting the good policies of the Government, nationalist cause and non-Brahmin cause.

\(^{75}\) *Tamil Nadu*, 23 September 1923, M.N.N.R., p.1214.

\(^{76}\) *Navasakti*, 17 December 1926, M.N.N.R., p.27.

\(^{77}\) *Anandavijayan*, September 1923, M.N.N.R., p.1214.
Non-Brahmin Zillah Conference

The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu announced on 20 August 1917 that the policy of the Government was that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self governing institutions, with the view to the progressive realization of representative Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. The announcement was followed by a series of “non-Brahmin Conferences” in different parts of the province to urge moderation in reform so as to secure self government and equal opportunities for all groups in the non-Brahmin community. On the same day when Montagu announced the reform scheme in London the non-Brahmins held their first conference in Tamil Nadu. Since that time onwards the non-Brahmins began to gather mass support and infused awareness among themselves by sponsoring Zillah conferences in which the local non-Brahmin leaders also took an active part in shaping the Dravidian consciousness.

In this effort they first convened a non-Brahmin Zillah conference at Coimbatore on 20 August 1917. Presided by the Raja of Panagal, M.R. Kalinga Rayar gave the welcome address. In his presidential address, the Raja of Panagal attacked the Brahmin domination and condemned the Brahmins for enslaving the rest of the mass by means of education and teaching of Vedas. He also concluded that if the non-Brahmins were given opportunities to study Sanskrit and to teach the Vedas, they also could come up as well-groomed citizens. But the Brahmins were preventing the non-Brahmins in doing so. He also replied to the various questions raised by the Brahmins and furnished the

79. Saraswathi, S., Minorities in Madras State, p.72.
81. Madras Mail, 3 December 1917, 13 January and 30 December 1919.
reasons for the anti-Home Rule Movement. He remarked: “we want Home Rule but we want it by gradual means”. He added, all the groups of society should be given equal opportunities and equal status and they should attain progress. On the second day of the conference eleven resolutions on various issues were passed. The conference gave ceremonial prayer for the success of Britain in the First World War (1914-1918). Measures were insisted on free and compulsory education, communal representation, gradual reforms and moderation in demands. T.M. Nair, speaking at the conference said that the sentiment of the non-Brahmins had been existing in the country “for generation” and that it was openly expressed then because “non-Brahmins” were looking to the British Government for protection to hold scale evenly and to mete out justice, but when they saw a movement was progressive whose object was to undermine British influence and power in this country, they thought it their duty to rally round the British Government and to support them. The Madras Mail also notified that “the sentiment underlying the movement is the deep-rooted fear and distress; the non-Brahmin community has of Brahmin domination.... This underlying sentiment has been in existence for ages....”

The second conference was held at Bikkavel in the Godavari Zillah presided by Chellapillai Kumararaja on 27 and 28 October 1917. M.Venkatatarinam Naidu gave welcome address. Since this was the first non-Brahmin conference held in the Godavari Zillah less than 2,000 members represented. P.Ramarayaniningar and A.P.Patro also attended. The president, in his address, vividly described the history of the origin of non-Brahmin movement.

The third Zillah conference began on 3 November 1917 and went on for two days at Pulivendala of Cuddappah Zillah in the Rayalaseema.

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82. Ibid., 21 August 1917.

83. Ibid., 22 August 1917.

84. Ibid., 31 December 1917.
K. Subba Reddiar convened the conference. P. Duraisamy Naidu gave welcome address. This conference gave a clear outline of the Brahmanical outrages in various fields against the non-Brahmins. T.M. Nair and Thiagaraya Chetty attended the conference from Madras.

The fourth Zillah conference was held at Bezwada on 11 and 12 November 1917 with P. Thiagaraya Chetty as the president of the conference and K.V. Reddy Naidu as the president of reception committee. Volunteers came from six Telugu zillahs. K.V. Reddy Naidu in his welcome address gave a clear counter-attack against the Brahmins. P. Thiagaraya Chettiar in his presidential address gave some references from the past. He explained the reasons for the success of Alexander’s invasion into India and pointed out the disunity of Indians as one of the factors. He further said that because of the Ashwamedha Yaga, the Brahmins divided the country during the time of King Porus and consequently Chenghizkhan captured India easily because of the then prevailing internal disputes. Only during the British rule, the condition of change and peace prevailed, he argued. Besides, he attacked Annie Besant in a strong language. He remarked that she was the one who once argued that “India is a land of various religions and castes and it is the country which is not applicable for self-rule or Home Rule and now she is claiming Home Rule for the Indians”. Above all, he explained how the Brahmins dominated the others through English education which was introduced by Macaulay. He also noted that since time immemorial the Brahmins were riding on the shoulders of others for their livelihood. Such a physical workless group’s duty was to learn education, and so they easily got education and came to the key position in the social ladder. He further insisted on the Government to provide the same opportunities to the non-Brahmins.

The fifth non-Brahmin conference was held on the southern most part of India at Tirunelveli under the presidentship of P. Thiagaraya Chetty on 3 December 1917. Over one thousand members and one thousand volunteers attended the conference. The meeting was attended by various leaders and
zamindars of the Tirunelveli region. Among them were Medai-Dalavoy Tirumalaiappai Mudali and the zamindars of Singampatti, Ilayarasanandel and Kuruvikulam. This conference was the first of its kind in the Tirunelveli region, known for its bravery and patriotism in the past.

The sixth Zillah conference for non-Brahmins commenced at Salem on 9 December 1917. K.S.Durairaj presided over the function. He explained the benefits of the British rule and the plans of the members of the Congress and Home Rule Movement to prevent such measures and their exploitation of the non-Brahmins.  

Visit of Lord Chelmsford and Montagu

On 24 December 1917 Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India and Montagu, the Secretary of State for India arrived at Madras for suggesting constitutional reforms for India. Various deputationists called on and submitted their memorandums to them. Among these were the Madras Presidency Association, South Indian Liberal Federation, Dravidian Association and Non-Brahmin Association. The Madras Presidency Association was headed by Kesava Pillai. This Association came into existence only on the support of the Brahmins. It accepted the proclamation of the nineteen members of the Imperial Council who were backed by the Home Rule League. The remaining three Associations had together fifty members. The South Indian Liberal Federation was headed by P.Rajaratina Mudaliar. The Dravidian Association was headed


86. The Madras Presidency Association was run by pro-Congress non-Brahmin leaders. It opposed the political policy of Justice Party. The important leaders were E.V.Ramaswami, Kesava Pillai and others. In December 1917 Kesava Pillai insisted in the Madras Provincial Congress conferences for adequate representation of non-Brahmins in Legislative Council. V.Chakkarai Chetty warned that many non-Brahmins would desert the Congress if Kesava Pillai’s resolution was defeated. But leaders like Pattabi Sitaramiah and Rajaji supported the resolution. These forces both within and without the Congress Party, helped to strengthen the non-Brahmin Movement. (New India, 22 December 1917)
by P.Ramarayaninar. For the non-Brahmin Association, Venkataratinam undertook the leadership. Among all the petitions the representation of the South Indian Liberal Federation was given due importance. Its recommendation was read by P.Thiagaraya Chetty. He expressed the views of the Party very clearly and placed the following suggestions. Firstly, he asserted that India was not fit for Home Rule and that out of 4,65,00,000 only 65,00,000 people were politically conscious of their rights and privileges. Secondly, if the report of the nineteen members of the Imperial Legislative Council was accepted, there would be an end to British rule followed by the subsequent rule of Brahmin oligarchy. Thirdly, the progressive political development of a well defined policy was the only way to create confidence among the people. Timely and liberal concessions would prove to be suitable. Fourthly, he declared and advocated the following measures to be the next stage of reforms, namely extension of local self government, formulation of stringent rules to secure due and adequate representation of all communities and interests in different branches of administration, enlargement of the Legislative Council, franchise on communal basis and transfer of the departments of Local Self Government, Sanitation, Agriculture, Co-operative Credit and Industries to the control of Legislative Council.\(^\text{87}\) The Dravidian Association also shared the same view. The Viceroy brought the views of the non-Brahmins to his attention. As it created jealousy and hatred against the Brahmins, they took multiple steps to prevent the growth of non-Brahmin Movement. The non-Brahmins without fear and care about the barriers put by the Brahmins organised various non-Brahmin confederations.\(^\text{88}\)

**South Indian Non-Brahmin Confederation**

Of all the conferences, the South Indian Non-Brahmin confederation held in Madras city on 28 and 29 December 1917 symbolised the growing political


awareness among the non-Brahmins. The meeting was held at Wellington Theatre at Mount Road in which over 1,500 delegates participated. As Thiagaraya Chetty, the president of the reception committee fell ill, Tirumalai Pillai presented his report on his behalf. Generally, in that conference the following matters were discussed:

1. The Government should give importance to primary education through Tamil or other Dravidian languages in lieu of Sanskrit and English education.

2. Agricultural ryots should be provided with lands and other facilities such as co-operative societies and modern implements. Moreover, the farmers should be sent to the agricultural colleges of Coimbatore.

3. Technical education should be made free by reducing the fees levied for education.

4. The non-Brahmins should be given appointments in the public services and measures were to be taken to check the increasing Brahmin appointments.

5. The panchayat system was to be developed by giving more powers.

6. The existing malpractices in public places and charitable institutions must be stopped. By doing so, the people could be prevented from paying a lot of fees to the Brahmin lawyers who were responsible for biased reports.

7. The religious tradition left by Kambar, Ramanuja, Buddha and Thiruvalluvar were to be preserved. The Brahmins should be condemned for their immorality in doing segregation and discrimination.

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On the second day of the conference held on 29 December 1917 nineteen resolutions were passed. The first resolution required loyalty to the British Government. T.M.Nair brought the second resolution concerning political progress. Moreover, they discussed matters related to communal representation and communal appointments in the railway service, education, local self-government and handicrafts.\(^91\)

After the end of the First World War in 1918, changes took place in the political activities of India. Democracy was the cry of the Day to represent Peoples representation in the legislature. In this situation, Montagu visited India. He and the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford prepared the Montagu-Chelmsford report which was embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919. The most important innovation of the Government of India Act of 1919 was the system of dyarchy introduced at the provincial level. According to the system the provincial Government was composed of two sections namely, the transferred and the reserved sections. The transferred departments like education, agriculture, excise and local self-government were handled by the elected ministers who were responsible for the legislative council and reserved departments like Justice and finance was administered by the members of the Governor’s executive council.\(^92\)

In the Madras Provincial election of 1920, the Justice Party got the majority. Out of 98 seats in the Madras Presidency, the Justice party got 63 seats. Among the nominated members it claimed 18 as its supporters. In a chamber of 127 members it claimed a strength of 81. Governor Willington invited the party leader P.Thiyagaraya Chetty to form ministry. In those days, the Chief Minister was called ‘Premier’. The customary practice of inviting the

\(^91\) Muthusamy Pillai, S., *op.cit.*, pp.41-55.

leader of majority party to form ministry was for the first time introduced in 1920. But he refused to accept the Premiership. Therefore the Governor in December 1920 invited Subbarayalu Reddiar of Cuddalore to form a Ministry and to take responsibility of administration. Panagal Raja and K. Venkata Reddy Naidu associated themselves as ministers in the first cabinet. Subbarayulu Reddiar, a well known administrator, within a month of assumption of office, acclaimed with honorary title Haiser-Hi-Kist, an award of Gold medal.⁹³

The first ministry of the Justice Party was formed on 17 December 1920. Accordingly, A Subbarayalu Reddiar the Premier looked after Education, Public Work, P.Ramarayaningar, local Self-Government and Public Health and K.Venkat Reddi Naidu, Development.⁹⁴

Within two days after the death of Subbarayalu Reddiar, the vice-minister Panagal Raja became the premier. He was known as the Panagenndi Raja Ramarayaningar. Panagenndi was his native village. He belonged to a well to do family, and proficient in Tamil, Telugu, English and Sanskrit and from the beginning he was very much interested in Justice Party.

Soon after assuming office, the Justice Party isolated the demands of the Depressed Classes. Once in power, it became almost a caste-Hindu party with little interest in social reform.⁹⁵ The second general election to the Madras Legislative Assembly took place on 31 October 1923. The Justice Party secured only 44 out of the 98 elective seats. However, with the support of the Governor, the party formed a ministry under the leadership of the Raja of Panagal with the


The death of Thiagaraya Chetty was followed by the defeat of the Justice Party in the council elections of 1926, and the entry of E.V.R into the Justice party camp. The self-respect ideology came to be slowly preached in the meetings of the Justice Party. E.V.R participated in the Tenth Non-Brahmin Conference at Madurai in December 1926 and sympathized with the social side of the Justice Party and expressed his belief that unless the masses had a sense of their self-respect no self-government was possible to a province or country.

The demise of T.M. Nair in London in 1919 and P.Thiagaraya Chetty in 1925 at an earlier date was rude shock to the party men. The future of the party was questioned. In 1926 election was held. P.T.Rajan became the unquestionable leader and he only brought the stature of the party from decline. In this election, the Justice party got single majority. Hence, the party decided to form ministry with the support of the prominent Independent candidate P.Subbarayan. The British also backed the cause of Subbarayan. As a result, P.Subbarayan, the leader of the Independent party formed ministry with A.Ranganatha Mudaliar and R.N. Arokiaswami as ministers. The Justice leader formed a ministry again in 1930 and kept the dyarchy alive thereby till 1937. The Swarajists refused to accept the office.

According to the Indian Councils Act of 1935, elections were held in February 1937, in which the Justice Party was voted by the Congress. In the lower house, the legislative assembly, out of 215 seats the Congress won 159,

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the Justice Party 17, Independent and others 39, and in the upper house, the legislative council out of 46 elected seats the Congress won 30, the Justice Party 4 and Independent and others 12. on 31 March 1937 Raja of Bobbili resigned from the premiership.

The European Christian missionaries laid the foundation for social protest movement in Tamil Nadu. Though they were interested in evangelization of the religion, they attacked the superstitious beliefs and caste atrocities of those days and created a new awareness among the Depressed Classes. The consolidation of the Depressed Classes was greatly helped by the influence of the British officials, the effect of the missionary activities among the local in Depressed communities and the growing realization that in education lay the key to the future political power.

**Tamil Renaissance**

The roots of Tamil renaissance coincided with the growth of non-Brahmin movement in the early twentieth century. The flowering of this renaissance demanded that the non-Brahmins or the Dravidians should become the custodians of their own culture. The non-Brahmin movement with its culmination of formation of Justice Party provided a catalyst to a new cultural awakening among the Tamils. The various non-Brahmin Zillah conferences and confederations gradually broke the exclusiveness and power of Brahmin citadels by de-Sanskritzation of Dravidian languages. It encouraged the Dravidian language especially of Tamil. In March 1918 the Madras Dravidian Association sent a petition to the viceroy which demanded that the Dravidian languages should be included in the B.A. Honours Course. P.Ramarayanigar in the course of his talk observed that “the Dravidian languages were important for the non-Brahmin communities like Sanskrit for the Brahmins.”

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the Thanjavur-Thiruchirapalli non-Brahmin conference was held at Thanjavur on 30 and 31 March 1918. It condemned the Madras University for its leniency to Sanskrit and its detrimental attitude to the Dravidian languages. In June 1919 a non-Brahmin conference was held at Thiruchirapalli. It passed a resolution that Tamil Civil Service examiners should know the classical Dravidian languages on the same footing as of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit.

The organisation of Justice Party developed on the support it received from the Depressed classes in Tamil Nadu. To begin with, it was the culmination of a political socio-economical movement due to the impact of western education and study of political institutions. The changed attitude of the British administration in granting constitutional reforms motivated the political aspirations of the Tamils. In an attempt to compete with the Brahmin dominated INC, the non-Brahmin leaders projected the problems of Backward and Depressed Classes. Slowly, the political allegiance of a section of the people could be drifted to their socio-economic problems and difficulties. Through press propaganda, platform and organizing of conferences and meetings, the non-Brahmin programme consolidated itself into a counter political movement.

On 14 March 1917 at a meeting held in Madras, T.M. Nair voiced that Home Rule could not be achieved at one bound and as a step towards it the Legislative Council should be enlarged in such a way as to provide training for people from different castes. It led to the social transformation which included distribution of jobs, avoidance of caste degradation and disappearance of taboos and decentralization of powers to the Depressed Classes.

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102. Ibid., 2 April 1918.

103. Ibid., 24 June 1919.

104. Madras Mail, 18 October 1917.