Chapter II

EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICS OF REGION

There were many waves of regional protests and assertions emanating from the southern Madras Presidency against the center in the colonial period. These regional revolts were against the colonial administration in the beginning as part of the emerging anti-imperial movement. Later on the regional discontent came to be directed against Indian National Congress too. The politics of the region in the first half of the twentieth century is characterized by the germination of regionalism in the social, political milieu, its emergent in opposition to congress inspired, directed freedom movement and the gradual accommodation of regional social classes, concerns and aspirations in the national struggle. As congress directed anti-colonial movement approached the destination of independence, regionalization of general politics and congress social base was simultaneously taking place.

The regional communities belonging to commercial and trading occupations organized the anti-British movement in the southern presidency in the first half of the 19th century. A notable organizer of the anti-colonial movement was a Non-Brahmin was Lakshamana Arasu Chetti. He was perhaps the first to adopt the western form of political protest in South India and his western education and affluent economic background provided the necessary organizational and intellectual capacity to organize the anti-colonial struggle. The incipient political organization of the southern region against British centre was induced by the escalating nature of the missionary agitation in India.

Among the series of events that provoked the emergence of organized political protests in South India three were very important and all three of them were related to religious sensitivities. Firstly the Christian missionaries backed up by European residents in Madras including some prominent civil and military officials protested against the support extended by British authorities to the Hindu practices and festivals under the
Regulation VII of 1817 whereby the untouchables and Christian converts were pressurized to assist in the celebration of Hindu festivals. Faced with the increasing stridency of protest official decision was taken by the Board of Directors in 1838 to immediately end official connection with religious festivals of India. This decision of the government to withdraw from the supervision of Hindu temples and endowments angered the Hindus, as they perceived it as a concession to missionary agitation.

The second episode provoking the angry reaction of the Madras region to the colonial centre was the conversion of three high caste Hindu students who embraced Christianity despite parental opposition in the Black Town area of the city then considered to be the fortress of Hindu conservatism. The advent of Tweedeelee administration in the province in 1842 too ignited the widespread protest in the region as the regional Hindu communities believed that a missionary party consisting of a loose coalitional of officials and missionaries had began to monopolize the decision making power of the local government.

The emergence of modern political protest in the Madras region was also provoked by the controversy generated by the Lex Loci report of the Indian law commission in 1840 where the Hindu and Islamic laws concerning the forfeiture of rights to ancestral property in the aftermath of conversion to other religions were nullified. Against these grievances and controversies that were quintessentially religious in nature the modern protest was organized in the region of Madras and Lakshmana Arasu Chetti was in the forefront of the agitation.

The early political leadership of Madras region primarily constituted by the merchant classes did not survive for long because of its intrinsic disadvantages. They as merchants depended on the European controlled commerce and as they were not sufficiently independent they were not able to pose a serious and protracted challenge to British colonialism. Their smaller size, organizational shallowness, dependence on British colonial classes etc chocked the emerging protest of the region in early half of 19th
The second generation of political protest from the region came in the second half of the 19th century from the emerging professional middle classes that were exclusively constituted by Brahmins. In their professional and economic advancement the Brahmins faced the discriminating attitude of the European middle classes of colonial India. The direct and indirect support of colonialism to their European rivals induced a new thinking among the regional elites of Brahmins about the desirability and necessity of forming a modern political organization to protect their interests. Accordingly they formed Madras Mahajana Sabha in 1884. This Sabha proved to be the fore runner of the Indian National Congress in Madras Presidency. The delegates sent by the Sabha attended the first meeting of Indian National Congress in Bombay in 1885. In 1894 the Madras Mahajana Sabha was affiliated to the Madras Congress Committee. Earlier the Sabha successfully conducted the annual session of Indian National Congress in 1888 in Madras.

The emergence of Brahmin protest against colonialism in 1880's was induced by regional factors and events to a great extent. The establishment of Madras Mahajana Sabha in 1884 was greatly motivated by the Hindu-Muslim roots in the city of Salem in 1882. Brahmins dominated the regional elite in the Madras Presidency because of their advantages in economic, social, religious and cultural domains. This regional elite gradually acquired national vision and aspiration to become part and parcel of modern national elite of India. They began their political journey essentially from the point of region though they reached the destination of national elite later. Therefore the emergence of Brahmins and Madras Mahajana Sabha represented the second wave of protest from Madras region to the colonial centre.

The third wave of modern political action emanated from Madras region in the form of Non-Brahmin protest. The essentially regional communities like Mudaliyars, Vellalas protested against the Brahmin domination of the Indian national movement and ploughed their own independent political path. This wave of political action from the
region was basically anti-Brahmin in nature. The Brahmin because of traditional advantages and modern factors constituted the national elite in early twentieth century and the revolt of the region in Madras this time was against them. This Brahmin – Non-Brahmin conflict was rooted in the indigenous social, religious, political and cultural structures and has persisted for a protracted period of time. The process by which the regional Non-Brahmin community struggled against the Brahmins to capture the organizational rungs and leadership domains of the Congress Party basically constitutes the regionalization of the Congress Party on the state.

Brahmin–Non-Brahmin conflict in the pre-1916 period

The Brahmin–Non-Brahmin conflict emerged in the later half of the nineteenth century as Brahmins because of historical, religious, educational and social factors began reaping the benefits of modern careers while the Non-Brahmins lagged behind them. The colonial government and its important administrators highlighted the emerging hegemony of Brahmins in the governmental jobs partly impelled by their desire to make administration representative of the social diversities of Madras Presidency and partly in their devious scheme of 'Divide and Rule India'. In 1871 itself the superintendent of census W.R. Cornish wrote that politically it was not to the advantage of the government that every question connected with the progress of the country should be viewed through the medium of Brahmin spectacles. He urged the government to limit the number of Brahmins in official positions and alternatively to undertake measures to increase the intake of Non-Brahmins in official services. He forcefully argued against the preponderance of any one community like Brahmins in government administration, as it would be detrimental to the interests of Non-Brahmins and India.

Sankaran Nair

Sankaran Nair was one of the foremost leaders of the Non-Brahmin movement in the incipient phase. A Malayalee Non-Brahmin he was closely associated with the Congress politics in the closing decade of the 19th century. He was the first Non-Brahmin judge of the Madras High Court. He, in a steadfast manner attacked Brahmin supremacy and
He argued that Brahmin dominated legislatures were inherently incapable of promoting the welfare of the common masses of India as the Brahmin reactionaries would oppose with all their might any reforms intended to weaken the priestly class. Therefore he advocated the formation of diverse legislative councils to deal with different social positions and classes.

He attacked the Brahmin hegemony of the Indian press and questioned its credentials and commitment to the development of Indian masses. He was aggrieved at the 'vehement venom poured by the Brahmin press' on him whenever he advocated distribution of power and authority to Non-Brahmins. He considered the intransigent and imprudent behavior of the Brahmin dominated press as a proof of the incapacity of the Brahmins for self government as it revealed their incapacity to handle conflicting social interests and demands.

It was his firm conviction that social reconstruction of India should be attempted before the articulation of political reforms. While delivering the convocation address to the new graduates of the University of Madras in 1908, he vivisected the evils of caste system and emphatically opined that the British rule should continue as long as the heterogeneous negative divisions of Indian society persisted. He exhorted the students to destroy the social barriers of caste so that a new India characterized by unity in interest, character and social mission could be formed. On behalf of that India political reform could be demanded with more strength and solidity of convictions was the strong opinion of Sanakaran Nair. He did not shy away from attacking the educational institutions of Brahmin concentration and he looked at the Theosophical Movement under Annie Besant leadership with suspicion. He opposed the establishment of the Hindu University in Benaras under the instructions of Bessant as he believed it would foster Brahmins and further caste entrenchment.
T.M. Nair

T.M. Nair was in the vanguard of the Non-Brahmin movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Like Sankaran Nair he too was a Non-Brahmin and his efforts proved to be crucial in the formation of the Non-Brahmin Justice Party in 1916. He was intimately connected with Congress politics till his dissatisfaction with the party reached the breaking point in the 1916 elections to the Imperial Legislative Council.

He was actively involved in Congress Party affairs and in 1898 he participated in the Congress session in Madras. He, in this session worked hard to pass the resolution regarding Medical Registration Bill to promote the interests of medical fraternity in India. In the succeeding session of Congress at Lucknow in 1899 he participated by mobilizing and taking a number Congress cadres from Madras to Lucknow. He presided over the North Arcot District Congress Committee held at Chittoor in 1907. He very often protested against the repressive attitudes and activities of the colonial administration as a congressman.

He also paid attention to the problem of the labour and looked at it through the prism of nationalism. As a member of the Labour commission he toured all over India and gave critical suggestions, which were contrary to the official recommendations of the commission. He argued with a nationalistic spirit for the reduction of working hours in the factories and enactment of an act for that purpose. He even went to London to campaign for his pro labour policies and to awaken the consciousness of British people about Indian labour problems.

He also engaged himself in the politics of the legislatures. In 1912 the Madras Corporation chose him as a member of the Madras Legislative Council. But in 1916 the elections to the Imperial Legislative Council ended the long and active association of T.M. Nair with nationalist politics. In accordance with the provisions of Minto-Morley scheme two members were to be elected from Madras in 1916 to Imperial Legislative Council. There were seven candidates in the field for the two seats. They were C.
There were three Non-Brahmins including the lone Muslim candidate for the two seats. In this interesting contest B.N. Sharma was elected from the northern districts and V.S. Srinivasa Sastry elected from the South. As both the elected members were Brahmins and as all Non-Brahmin candidates were defeated this election precipitated angry reaction from T.M. Nair.

The defeated non-Brahmin candidate was highly disappointed with the defeat and characterized it as a manifestation of Brahmin conspiracy. He believed that that the Brahmins had voted against him in favour of a fellow Brahmin and began to characterise his defeat as the defeat of all Non-Brahmins. Perhaps more than the defeat, the disappointment caused by the failure of the Brahmin support assured to TM Nair was the root cause of Non-Brahmins extreme disappointment. He and other Non-Brahmins refused to accept the arguments of Brahmins that the elected candidate V.S.Srinivasa Sastry was elected mostly on the basis of Non-Brahmin votes.

The Non-Brahmin press especially *West Coast Spectator* and *Malayali* looked at the defeat of T.M. Nair with extreme anger and West Coast Spectator wrote that the Mylapore, Egmore and Triplicane groups (meaning different Brahmin groups) could not say with honesty that they were not responsible for the defeat of Non-Brahmins and the insidious creeping in of insecurity in Non-Brahmin minds. This press was skeptical of the nationalist Congress even earlier. For example in 1914 the Malayali described the INC session held at Madras as 'Brahmin Congress'. At that time it had even foretold that the Non-Brahmin Hindus would walk out of Congress a law Muslims to form their own political organisation to fight their own causes as the Congress satisfied only Brahmins interests. The defeat of T.M.Nair in 1916 proved to be the turning point in the provincial politics of Indian National Congress in the Madras Presidency leading to the formation of the Justice Party in 1916.
Home Rule Movement

The Home Rule Movement was organized by Annie Besant in 1916 in Madras based on the model of Irish Home Rule Leagues to achieve the objective of self-government for India. She firmly argued that by promoting political education and discussion through public meetings, organizing libraries and reading rooms containing books on national politics, conducting propaganda through newspapers, pamphlets, posters etc., consciousness of the common people in India and Britain could be raised to demand self-rule for India.\(^\text{14}\)

The anti Brahmin Justice Party attacked the Home Rule Movement and its main protagonists in Madras vehemently. The Non-Brahmin leaders criticized her for advocating through her theosophical movement anachronistic ideas. They were extremely annoyed with her close association with Brahmins in the Presidency. The Non-Brahmin press characterized the Home Rule as Brahmin rule.\(^\text{15}\)

T.M. Nair, the icon of the Justice Party launched a vicious attack on Annie Besant and Home Rule Movement. He criticized her for being a willing stooge of Brahmins and argued that the selfish and greedy Brahmins would reap the rewards and fruits of the Home Rule agitation. He condemned the Brahmins for using Home Rule League as a smokescreen to achieve their sectional and hegemonic interests. He declared that the Non-Brahmins were not ready for Home Rule and hence it should neither be demanded by Non-Brahmins nor granted by the colonial government.

The Non-Brahmin movement also found fault with Annie Besant on the grounds that invidious, iniquitous and divisive customs were blissfully adhered to in her organisation. They took exception to a particular incident where she had refused to introduce inter-dining in the organization.\(^\text{16}\) While there was a concentrated attack on Home Rule League from Justice Party the attitude of the Congress Non-Brahmins was a divided one. Some Non-Brahmin Congressmen, with abundant enthusiasm participated in her agitational politics. For example Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu toured extensively to
popularize the ideals of the movement among the masses and in this endeavor he adopted the revolutionary strategy of utilizing Tamil to awaken the people. Notwithstanding this fact, there was a perceptible stream of animosity towards her and her movement from some Non-Brahmins and the grounds on which they looked at her with suspicion and dissatisfaction were not dissimilar to the arguments of Besant baiting Non-Brahmin Justice Party.

One controversial incident brought out the uncomfortable relationship between Congress Non-Brahmins and Annie Besant. In one of the Madras Provincial Congress meetings an altercation developed between Annie Besant and a Non-Brahmin congressman. P. Kesava Pillai over the composition of the future constitution of India. Annie Besant argued that the future representative institutions should be constituted solely through the strategy of elections the Non-Brahmin Congressman vehemently criticized her for being ignorant of the general social structure of Madras Presidency. He argued that in any future constitutional framework there should be provisions not only for elections but also nominations as only through nominations the depressed classes could find their representation. The Non-Brahmin evaluated her understanding and knowledge of India as superficial and second hand and requested her to refrain from speaking about justice. Another Non-Brahmin C. Karunakaran Menon also intensively hated Annie Besant and questioned her ability to understand and lead India.

Madras Presidency Association

The subterranean rancour of Non-Brahmins against the conspicuous dominance of Brahmins in the Congress Party organization and the general society of Tamil Nadu surfaced to establish a separate stream of a Non-Brahmin Congress body in 1917. A series of events in the second half of the second decade of 20th century provided the congenial backdrop for the formation of this Non-Brahmin organization within Congress. Firstly in 1916 the dissatisfied Non-Brahmins established South Indian Liberal Federation otherwise known as Justice Party to protect and promote the welfare of Non-Brahmins through a different organizational trajectory outside Congress. Secondly the
The historic Congress-League pact signed in 1916 at Lucknow provided for the grudging acceptance of Communal Electorate by the Congress Party.\textsuperscript{19} Thirdly Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India made an announcement in the House of Commons on August 20, 1917 in London "The policy of His Majesty's government is that the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the general development of self-government institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire"\textsuperscript{20}

These three events provoked the Non-Brahmin Congressmen to initiate the process of formation of a separate Non-Brahmin organization for themselves. The formation of the Justice Party and its relentless attacks on Home Rule Movement and the cardinal objectives of Indian National Congress spurred them to form a specific organization that would protect the sanctity and nationalist image of Congress Party even while striving to achieve the welfare of Non-Brahmins. The Congress-League scheme too prepared the backdrop for the formation of a Non-Brahmin Congress wing as they approached the scheme with skeptical attitude, for though it contained in outlines the minimum constitutional demands of the Muslim League and Congress it said nothing about the Non-Brahmins. The announcement of the Secretary of State for India in the House of Commons made the Non-Brahmin Congressmen realize the imminent devolution of some kind of power to India and therefore the need for a separate organization that would vigorously argue for the allocation of greater benefits to them. When the Justice Party leader Tyagaraja Chetti sent a cable to Montague arguing his Non-Brahmin concerns, one Congress Non-Brahmin wrote to the New India arguing that though there was no point in keeping Brahmins out of a political organization, there must be some organizational means limited to Non-Brahmins which would voice Non-Brahmin opinion within Congress in opposition to the claims of the Justice Party.\textsuperscript{21}

Another Non-Brahmin Congressman who later on became one of the important functionaries of the Madras Presidency Association, Salla Guruswami wrote a letter to The Hindu urging that the Congress-League Scheme should be pressed on Montague
subject only to the principle of adequate recognition of various Non-Brahmin communities of South India.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1917 Gopalswamy Mudaliar, a Non-Brahmin Congressman organized a meeting of Congress Non-Brahmins at Gokale hall in Madras city to discuss the avenues through which Non-Brahmin interests could be secured and incorporated in the Congress-League scheme. But the proceedings were not fruitful as the Justice Party men under the leadership of O.Kandasami Chetty came and disrupted the meeting leading to the complete breakdown of tranquility in the enveloping air of fracas.\textsuperscript{23}

But the resilient Non-Brahmin Congressmen after a lapse of five days again convened their meeting and this time they had taken extensive precautions as only those persons with Congress credentials were admitted into the venue of the deliberations. They resolved to form a new separate organization, which would place before the Secretary of State for India a scheme of reforms designed to provide Non-Brahmin the demanded safeguards of communal representation.

Explaining the salient features and objectives of the newly formed association T.V. Kalyanasundaranar, a founder member said, "Without being antagonistic to the Congress principles the association will work for the welfare of the Non-Brahmins of Tamil Nadu."\textsuperscript{24} Diwan Bahadur Kesava Pillai became the President of this Non-Brahmin organization. Other prominent Congress Non-Brahmins Govind Doss, Salla Guruswami, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Pakkiriswamy Pillai, Sirkali Chidampanathathanda Mudaliar, Tanjore Srinivasa Pillai, George Joseph of Madurai were appointed as Vice-Presidents. Another group of Congressmen T.V. Gopalsamy Mudaliar, Gurusamy Naidu, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, Chakkarai Chettiar and T.V. Kalyanasundaranar were appointed as the Secretaries of this emergent organization. Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu was endowed with the responsibility of undertaking political tours to all areas of the Southern Presidency to propagate the objectives of this organization.\textsuperscript{25}
The Madras Presidency Association convened a special conference at the residence of Lord Govindas in Chennai under the Presidentship of Sirkali Chidamaparanatha Mudaliar. This conference discussed in detail the alternatives and avenues present before Non-Brahmins to realize the apparently contradictory demands of Home Rule and Non-Brahmin communal safeguards. This meeting was also significant as it was here for the first time that the two Non-Brahmin Congressmen Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and T.V. Kalyanasundaranar came to know each other, a personal and political friendship which withstanded the vicissitudes of political events for more than three decades.

The M.P.A. held its first annual conference in Chennai and one Venkatapathy Raju, presided over it. The second annual conference was held at Erode in 1919 and was presided over by Lord Govind Doss. The Congress Non-Brahmin E.V. Ramasamy Naicker who was later to spend a lifetime of political career advocating Non-Brahmin interests in opposition to the Congress Party was conspicuously associated with this conference as head of the Reception Committee. Emphasizing the nationalist credentials of this association Kalyanasundaranar amidst considerable opposition and reluctance introduced a resolution for the recall of Lord Chelmesford. He had to convince the reluctant and tentative delegates to win the passage of the resolution and to this end his considerable persuasive skills proved handy. This meeting of M.P.A. was also important as far as the personal equations among Non-Brahmin Congressmen were concerned as only here Kalyanasundaranar met Ramasamy Naicker and started their roller coaster political relationship lasting many decades.

The regionalization and Tamilization of the Congress Party in the later decades could be traced to this MPA. The Non-Brahmin members of Congress exhibited unbounded attention and affection for the Tamil language in contrast to the largely Sanskrit centric Brahmins. The Tanjour-Trichy conference of the MPA was held in 1918 in Tanjore and Kalianasundaranar here introduced a resolution for the compulsory use of Tamil as the medium of political organization, mobilization and communication. The resolution impressed upon the Congressmen the necessity and inevitability of using
Tamil language to awaken the political consciousness of the people. The ardent lover of Tamil language, Kalyanasundaranar launched an attack on the snobbish leaders who flaunted their conversational skills in English and who chose to avoid speaking in public platforms in Tamil. He implored the audience to revolt against these leaders for adapting English in their political speeches even though their mother tongue was Tamil and more importantly their command of the mother tongue was appreciable. Later he considered the passage of this resolution as the first revolution of his political life.

This episode, in embryonic form foretold the Tamilization of Congress Party organization, in particular in the middle of the century and the emergence of the "Patchiai Tamilan" Kamaraj in the 1950's as the most towering leader of the state. This episode authenticates decisively the argument that "The development of the wing within Congress, that to some extent was loyal to a parochial regional identity originated with the MPA and provided framework within which latter Tamilization of the Congress" must be viewed. 

The leaders of M.P.A. paid diligent attention to the task of building up the organizational structure for their political offshoot and in the capital city the central office came to be established and in many towns and cities spread across the sprawling Madras Presidency many branches were also established. They also conducted active recruitment drives and their membership arose to around 2000 as claimed by some Non-Brahmin Congressmen. Though the membership of M.P.A. was limited to castes and communities other than Brahmans and Muslims they were allowed to attend the conferences and gatherings of the party as observers. For example when MPA held its Tanjore conference in 1918 a large number of Muslims came from Muslim majority towns of the district and extended their solidarity.

Desiring to be an effective opponent of the Justice Party in their war of attrition the MPA leaders paid sufficient attention to the establishment of journalistic paraphernalia. The party had newspapers both in English and Tamil to defend itself from the attacks of its opponents. One of its leaders C. Karunakra Menon allowed his paper
'Indian Patriot' to be used to voice the interests and views of MPA in English and in Tamil 'Desabakthan' meaning patriot in Tamil was started under the vigorous editorship of Kalyanasundaranar, backed by a limited liability company.30

Reaction of the Justice Party

The Justice Party reprimanded the creation of the Madras Presidency Association and condemned it arguing that Brahmin Home Rulers in the interests of the united front bogey have engineered it into existence.31 While the Justice Party papers accused 'the MPA of being a tool of the Madras Brahmins, who had set it up purposely to try and reduce the popularity of the Justice Party' the MPA criticized the Justice Party as unrepresentative of the Non-Brahmins in the Presidency. The rivalry between these two organizations with similar interests and social base got intensified and not infrequently the MPA organized its conferences either simultaneously or immediately after the Justice Party conference and that too at the same venue.

An all-party Non-Brahmin conference at Vijayawada was called to forge an agreement between MPA and Justice Party. But the conference ended in a fiasco and resulted in bitterness and heartburning as the MPA accused Justice Party of intentionally excluding it from all offices at the conference and for putting unnecessary pressure by saying that they would be allowed to negotiate only after they had resigned their Congress membership.32

Impact of MPA

Though the MPA was only a temporary phenomenon in the politics of the State as it had disappeared into political oblivion after the satisfaction of its rationale as a result of the Meston Award, its legacy impinged on the dynamics of the Tamil politics greatly. In the short run it 'doubled the impact of the Justice Party on Tamil politics for it revealed that nationalists could also be regionalists and the Congress could not look askance at regional issues'.33 But the association had more crucial long-term implications. Besides
consolidating the Non-Brahmin leaders and opinions it provided a training ground for new leaders like E.V. Ramasamy Naicker of Non-Brahmin origin.

Though there were personal and political rapport and closeness between the leaders of MPA and the Brahmin leaders of Congress because of temperamental compatibility and symmetry of nationalist outlook, yet the substantial and substantive prognostications the party had for the future of the Tamil politics could not be overlooked. The development of a wing within a wing that to some extent was loyal to a parochial regional identity originated with the MPA and provided the framework within which the later 'Tamilization' of the Congress must be viewed. 34

Swaraj Party and Non-Brahmins

The Congress-Khilafat Swaraj party was formed by a group of leaders led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru in the aftermath of the Gaya Congress session with the objective of participating in electoral politics so that the inadequate Montford reforms could be exposed and the Government of India Act 1919 could be wrecked from within. Nevertheless the fledgling political party empathically expressed its determination to work within the Indian National Congress to achieve the fundamental objectives of Congress prescribed national struggle. 35

The leading Non-Brahmin E.V. Ramasamy Naicker made swinging attacks on Swaraj party for choosing to participate in the elections subsequent to the 1919 Government of India. While his scathing criticism on the electoral party of pro-changers was synonymous with the general stream of anti-Swarajist criticism in one respect, in another dimension it was unique and was symptomatic of the underlying Brahmin – Non-Brahmin conflict within the provincial unit of the Congress. He attacked the party and made gloomy prognostications that the Swaraj party would abhorrently strengthen the already entrenched Brahmins and consequently would prove to be a stumbling block as far as Non-Brahmin development was concerned. 36
On the eve of the Madras Municipal Council elections Ramasamy Naicker under a pseudonym wrote an article warning the voters not to vote for the candidates of Swaraj party. He compared the Swaraj party in the province with the Liberal Party in other provinces and with its provincial competitor Justice Party and concluded that Swaraj party of Madras Presidency was worse, narrow-minded, sectional and selfish. He also attacked subsequently in a new article that Swaraj party utilized Gandhian ideology as a smokescreen to disguisedly achieve Brahmin welfare. His ideological predisposition in considering societal renaissance as primary need and political power as secondary one provided the necessary impetus to him to attack the Swaraj party. In fact this ideological orientation of Periyar continued throughout the chequered history of Dravidian movement and till the end he remained tenacious in his outlook regarding the primacy of society over politics.

He condemned the provincial unit of the Swaraj party and deplored its use as an instrument of Brahmin welfare and furthermore he took umbrage at the fact that the Brahmin controlled journalism in the province like Swadesamitran, Swarajya etc. were aiding and abetting the Swaraj party in realizing Brahmin hegemony and supremacy under the clock of nationalist sentiments. The patently biased and flagrantly sectional media undermined the position of Non-Brahmins and promoted unabashedly Brahmin hegemony through the devices of obfuscation of facts, prefabrication of falsehood etc.

He issued a request to the voters of Coimbatore in 1925 beseeching them to elect the candidates based on integrity of character, broadness of outlook and egalitarian spirit. He asked them not to be swayed by erroneous and extraneous considerations like political affiliations, campaign strategies and traditional positions. In 1925 Madras Corporation Council elections he conceded to the request of Justice Party leader Panagal King and campaigned among the people to choose only candidates with straightforwardness and moral integrity. He also criticized the Swaraj party for seeking to eliminate Non-Brahmin Congressmen from the politics of the province. Moreover he certified that comparatively speaking the Justice Party was better than the Swaraj party.
As the fortunes of the Swaraj party waxed and concomitantly the fortunes of the Justice Party waned the attacks of Periyar became more stringent and vehement. He said that calling the members of this party as Swarajists was tantamount to calling prostitutes as Devadasis, oppressors as Brahmins, civil servants of British India as public servants, the bunch of traders looting the wealth of the country as Governors, justifying the British governance as justice based system.\textsuperscript{40} He picked out the most important leader of provincial Swaraj party Srinivasa Iyengar as his special target and relentlessly attacked his nationalist credentials. The Brahmin leader’s close associations with British colonialism, his implacable opposition to Non-Cooperation movement and his refusal to give up his lucrative legal profession during the peak days of Non-Cooperation Movement constituted the plethora of causative factors for Periyar's virulent attack on Srinivasa Iyengar.

Periyar believed that the Non-cooperation of Gandhiji envisaged the non-cooperation of Indians with the British rule. But Swarajists deliberately distorted this concept and made it as though it was non-cooperation of Brahmins against Non-Brahmins. He deplored the anti-Non-Brahmin character and proclivity of Swaraj party not only in Madras Presidency but also in Bombay Presidency. He accused the Swarajists of undermining all the egalitarian institutions to re-establish with firmness and security the obnoxious and ubiquitous Varnashrama dharma.\textsuperscript{41}

He believed that as far as Madras Presidency was concerned the creation and functioning of Swaraj party was primarily to defeat and eliminate the Non-Brahmin Justice Party. He implored with the masses not to get swayed by the dissembling rhetoric of the Swaraj party leaders. Periyar made a comparison between Swaraj party and Justice Party while delivering a speech in the conference of the Justice Party in Coimbatore in 1926 when his complete departure from Congress seemed to be either immediate or imminent. He stated that the Justice Party possessed greater moral integrity as it did not suffer from double speak and double standard rhetoric. The Justice Party never pretended to work against the government. But the Swaraj party after intensely proclaiming to wreck the constitution and government had not only made compromises but even
collaborated with the colonial government to get administrative posts and enjoyed trappings of power. Their expressed opposition to government was a travesty of truth was the conviction of Periyar.\(^\text{42}\)

**Swaraj Party and Kanchipuram Conference**

The Non-Brahmin opposition to the Swaraj party politics became highly pronounced in the Kanchipuram conference. The Swaraj party leader Srinivasa Iyengar brought in a resolution in the conference that advocated the adoption of Swaraj agenda by Indian National Congress so that congress could actively participate in the legislative politics. While bringing the resolution Srinivasa Iyengar explicitly pointed out that the Indian National Congress should get wholeheartedly involved in the politics of the legislatures, as it was necessary to fight the hostile Justice Party in the province. He called for complete absorption of Swaraj party agenda by congress so that the unwanted and supercilious distinctions between Swaraj party and Indian National Congress got obliterated.\(^\text{43}\)

The Non-Brahmins largely adopted a critical attitude to this resolution. Mr. Singaravelu Chettiyar, a Non-Brahmin delegate introduced a change in the resolution whereby he wanted the conference to admonish the Swaraj party leaders for accepting posts and positions in the government contrary to their earlier proclamations.\(^\text{44}\)

Mr. Ramabathra Udayar, another congressman of Non-Brahmin origin criticized the Swaraj party for its past association with government and suggested that the trappings of power should not tempt the Swaraj party.\(^\text{45}\) E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker in his turn mounted a militant attack on the resolution and asked for the total rejection of Swaraj party agenda by Indian National Congress. He castigated the Swaraj party for making a mockery of the Gandhian principles and misappropriating his name and voice to secure power and privileges. He considered the resolution of Srinivasa Iyengar as being tantamount to not only furthering selfish interests of some Brahmins but also total Swarajmization and Brahminization of Congress Party in the province. He questioned the
S. Ramanadhan attacked Swaraj party and its resolution and advocated the opening of congress organizational gates to the Justice Party. He believed that Congress Party was a national association and all political parties had credentials and bonafides to be part and parcel of this association. He accused the Swaraj party of targeting abhorrently the Justice Party as it competed against them in the elections. He took strong exception to the diversion of congress organization to achieve Swaraj party’s ends. He decided to support the resolution of Swaraj party only on the condition of opening the organizational door of congress to other political party especially Justice Party. Thus the Non-Brahmin congressmen at Kanchipuram conference attacked Swaraj party for its ideological beliefs and also its opposition to the Justice Party.

**Vaikom Episode**

The simmering discontent between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins in the Congress and politics of the State worsened because of the Vaikom episode. Vaikom was a place in Travancore State outside the territorial expanse of the Madras Presidency yet the extant, anachronistic social practices of that locality directly and immensely impinged on the political dynamics of the Madras Presidency. Being a citadel of Brahmin orthodoxy extremely abhorrent untouchability and unapproachability were practiced in that area of Travancore State. The numerically, strongly, socially and ritually lowly placed Ezhava community suffered inhuman, obnoxious social disprivileges and liabilities.

A young lawyer belonging to this newly assertive but traditionally suppressed community came to the court to defend his client in a legal entanglement and as the court was located within the premises of the palace of Maharaja and more crucially as the religious ceremonies connected with the birthday celebrations of Maharaja were in full swing at that time, the orthodox Brahmins disallowed the entry of the low caste lawyer into the court fearing pollution from the physical approach of an Ezhava. The westernized
lawyer decided to oppose this patently iniquitous and extant rule and approached the leaders of his caste association and Kerala Congress Party. The Malayali leaders T.K. Madhvan, the editor of Deshabimani, George Joseph, a prominent Congressman, K.P. Kesava Menon the editor of Mathurubhumi took op this case of discrimination and after getting due permission from Mahatma Gandhi began their satyagraha agitation in an non-violent way to annul this traditional but invidious practice. But the police machinery of the Princely state took firm and stringent action against the peaceful protestors and imprisoned them.

Weakened by the arrest of local leadership and fearing about the futile future of the agitation the imprisoned leaders sought the assistance of the Congress organization in the neighboring Madras Presidency. Promptly E.V. Ramaswamy, the leader of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee conceded to their request as it suited his own ideological beliefs. He went to the concerned place to continue the agitation. When the firebrand leader of Madras Presidency reached the site of agitation, he was welcomed by the police apparatus of the princely state not with force and repression as was widely expected but with great warmth and affection. His unexpected welcome was because of the close association between the king and the E.V. Ramaswamy's family. The Maharaja of Travancore and his entourage stayed usually in the house and places of E.V. Ramaswami whenever they stayed at Erode while on their way to Delhi. Hence as a reciprocal gesture the Maharaja decided to extend hospitality to the son of his friendly family from Erode. But Periyar refused politely to accept the honour bestowed on him by the Travancore State and told the concerned authorities that he had come on a public mission against the administrative system of the State and hence personal friendship and relationship were to be overlooked. This conviction of Periyar regarding the separation of personal friendship and political behaviour and politically behaving in an impassioned manner without succumbing to personal relationships later on came to the conspicuously recorded in the annals of Madras politics, especially in his attitude towards Rajaji. Though Periyar remained an implacable antagonist of Rajaji in political domain, he successfully maintained a close personal relationship with him.
Periyar then conducted the agitation against the extant orthodoxy and attacked vigorously the inhuman social prohibitions on Ezhavas. In the course of his volatile speech Periyar remarked, "They argue that pollution would result if we untouchable passed through the streets leading to the temple. I ask them whether the Lord of Vaikom or the so-called orthodox Brahmins would be polluted by the presence of the untouchables. If they say that the presiding deity at the Vaikom temple would be polluted, then that would not be God, but a mere stone fit only to wash dirty linen with.".49

The administrative machinery of the Princely State was alarmed over the polemical, provocative speech of E.V. Ramasamy and decided to arrest him along with his associates like Ayyamuthu. They were sentenced to one-month imprisonment and were lodged in Arivikkuthu jail. In his absence Ramanathan, another close supporter of E.V. Ramasamy in Madras came and presided over the demonstrations. After the completion of one-month imprisonment E.V. Ramasamy was released and a warrant was served on him to leave the State immediately.50 As he decided to continue the agitation ignoring the warrant he was arrested and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment in the central jail at Trivandrum.51

Another important feature of the Vaikom agitation was the strong participation of women from Madras Presidency as he and his followers were arrested his wife Nagammaiyar came and led the demonstrations. The participation of women in the agitations conducted by Periyar was a regular feature and was symbolic of Periyar's inclinations towards women empowerment and gender equality.

Through Periyar was sentenced to 6 months of vigorous imprisonment he was released before the expiry of the period as Maharaja had passed away. Once released, he decided to come to Erode to look after his mother and promptly the British administration arrested him for his legal infractions allegedly committed earlier during a speech he made at the peak of Khaddar Campaign. Hence he was forced to discontinue his association with the Vaikkam Sathyagraha. But soon the agitation itself in Vaikom came to an end.
when the controversial roads were thrown open by the Travancore authorities to the deprived people.

The Vaikom Satyagraha was the first major episode in which E.V. Ramasamy participated to fight against Brahmin intransigent orthodoxy and it foretold the course of action which Periyar would take in the coming decades. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee holding a historically significant meeting a year later in 1925 officially expressed its thanks to Periyar for participating in the Vaikom Satyagraha. Periyar's popularity among the Non-Brahmin Tamil masses increased exponentially as a result of the Vaikom agitation and he was eulogized as 'Hero of Vaikom'.

E.V. Ramasamy, though satisfied with the beneficial result of the agitation felt aggrieved over the manner in which the vested interests attempted to deny him a role in the final settlement of the issue. He considered the meeting between Mahatma Gandhi and Maharani as a conspiracy of the Brahmin Diwan of Travancore and the Brahmin Congressman of Madras Presidency, Rajaji. "Naicker alleged that the aim of the Diwan and Rajaji in inviting Gandhi to mediate was to deny the credit for the successful conclusion of the Satyagraha to the local leaders and to protect some of the interests of the resident orthodox Brahmins at Vaikom".

He was also dejected by the wanton indifference of the provincial journalism towards his association with the Vaikom struggle. His agitation had been acknowledged and appreciated by only one paper Navasakthi run by a fellow Non-Brahmin Congressman Kalyanasundaranar. All other newspapers and journals as they were under the control of the Brahmins had wantonly ignored disseminating news about Vaikom Satyagraha especially his contribution to that struggle. Hence he began to start his own weekly to highlight his social concerns and named that weekly as 'Kudi Arasu' in 1925 meaning republic in Tamil.
Gurukulam Controversy

The Gurukulam or the traditional school was established by the Brahmin Congressman V.V.S. Iyer at Cheranmadevi, near Kallidaikurichi in 1922. This tract of Tirunelveli district was a fertile one irrigated by the revered Tamiraparani river. This place had been a controversial one characterized by Brahmin and Non-Brahmin conflicts for a long time. In 1917 itself the Non-Brahmin Justice Party had objected to the diversion of Taluk Boards funds to sponsor a Sanskrit College at Kallidaikurichi as it promoted caste distinctions.55

The Brahmin Congressman established the new institutions of Gurukulam with the objective of providing education to the emerging generation so that the exalted values of patriotism and social service would be sown among the people.56 The founders of the institution mobilized funds from interested and nationalist minded people and a lion's share of the funds were mobilized from Non-Brahmins. For example the prosperous Nattukottai Chettiyar community, which had gone overseas for business purposes, prosperous particularly in Burma and Malaysia donated a large amount of money to this institution. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee decided to provide a sum of Rs.5000 as first installment from its National Education Fund at the time of establishment of the institution. The second installment of a similar sum was promised to be given later.57

But soon the educational institution got embroiled in a bitter controversy as it was caught in the whirlpool of Brahmin and Non-Brahmin conflict. The Non-Brahmin students, among them one student a son of a prominent Congressman who was to become the Chief Minister of Madras State in independence period O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar complained that there was discrimination against them. They said they were segregated in the dining areas and served with different food. Their complaints about commensal restriction in the supposedly nationalist school aggravated the already existing antagonism between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins.
Arguments from Non-Brahmins

When the reports of discrimination against Non-Brahmin children reached the leaders of Congress, they felt understandably aggrieved over the invidious issue. A welter of criticism based on a plentitude of points emanated from the Non-Brahmin segment of the provincial Congress. All the important leaders came out against the extant, irrational and divisive discrimination practiced by the school management.

Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, the non-Brahmin Congress leader was in the forefront of the agitation and used his paper Tamil Nadu as the vehicle of campaign against Brahmin obduracy and hegemony at the Gurukulam. He wrote his articles in Tamil Nadu in March 1925 insisting that the school management should immediately and completely eliminate the commonsel restrictions otherwise they should return the grant made earlier by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. Moreover he warned in his article that if the above conditions were ignored or rejected by the school management the Non-Brahmin Congressmen would launch a Satyagraha to take over the possession of the concerned Gurukulam. 58

As the school management refused to comply with these directives, the Non-Brahmin leader undertook extensive tour of Tamil Nadu to mobilize popular opinion against the recalcitrant institution. While delivering a speech at Salem Dr. Naidu informed the audience that before the Tamils sought equality with foreigners, they should establish complete equality with the Brahmins in society and through this alone they could save the Non-Brahmins from the age long social injustice that had been meted out to them by the Brahmins. 59

Another meeting at Mayavaram, a Brahmin dominated town in the heart of the Cauvery delta in the composite Tanjore district had to be abandoned in confusion as the vested interests chose to disrupt the meeting with rumors and falsehood. 60 The crusading Naidu argued convincingly that the Gurukulam should cease the invidious practice if it was seriously interested in promoting the ideals of Indian nationalism. He reprimanded
the Gurukulam management for attempting to impose an atmosphere of inferiority on the Non-Brahmin children through its Brahminical partiality. It was his cardinal belief that "before Tamils sought freedom from the foreign yoke they must strive to attain complete equality with the Brahmins in the matter of inter-dining". Naidu announced that the Gurukulam conundrum would prove to be the deciding factor in the national life of the Non-Brahmins. He, with a tone bordered on intimidation and aggression said, "if I win it would be a glory to both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, but if I fail, the consequences would be disastrous to Brahmins."

Another Non-Brahmin Congressman with arguably more moderate temperament and definitely with more temperamental and ideological compatibility with Brahmins than Dr. Naidu or E.V. Ramasamy, Kalyanasundaranar too intervened to advise V.V.S. Iyer to cease the obnoxious practice at the Gurukulam. He recommended alternative solutions to the problem and suggested the shifting of the Gurukulam to some other place where rigours of orthodoxy were not severe. But the founder of the school repudiated his well-intentioned intervention rather curtly.

E.V. Ramasamy another Non-Brahmin Congressman initially inexplicably was somewhat disinterested in the burgeoning controversy but soon he was forced to plunge into the issue headlong as he was infuriated over the clandestine activities of the Joint Secretary of TNCC who was a Brahmin. In the face of the mounting controversy the TNCC now firmly under the grip of Non-Brahmins refused to part away with the second installment promised by it to the Gurukulam at the time of establishment. But the much-assailed management of the institution bypassed these unrelenting Non-Brahmins and got the second installments through a cheque signed by the Joint Secretary. E.V.Ramasamy, the Secretary of TNCC, rightly construed this measure as a betrayal and he declared an all out war on the Gurukulam.

S. Ramanathan, another Non-Brahmin Congressman agitated vigorously against the inter-dining restrictions. He organised a meeting of Non-Brahmin Congressmen in his house to chalk out the course of action against the recalcitrant Gurukulam management.
Arguments of Brahmins

The Brahmins argued that the general society of the Tamil speaking areas did not practice inter-dining and even in educational institutions operated by the government commensal restrictions were commonplace. The Brahmin leaders led by V.V.S. Iyer maintained that "in the absence of such customs in society it would be unwise to insist that the Gurukulam alone should enforce inter-dining among its students". Some other Brahmin leaders led by Rajaji argued that though commensal restrictions were outdated and abhorrent still the time was not ripe to impose their views on the institution and it should be allowed to solve the sensitive problem of inter-dining without outside intervention.

The Brahmin Congressmen also criticized the attitude of the Non-Brahmin Congressmen like Naidu and Naicker as tantamount to "endangering national unity by promoting communal ill-feeling in Tamil society". They even attempted to bring a censure motion based on this argument against Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu in the TNCC annual meeting held at Tiruchirappalli in 1925.

M.K. Acharya and T.S.S. Rajan argued that inter-dining should not be enforced on those who could not follow the practice in their own accepted principles alluding to the fact that even different Non-Brahmin communities practice commensal restrictions. They also denied that a Gurukulam management had given any assurances to the donors about inter-dining. They pointed out that Gurukulam did not practice originally commensal restrictions but had begun implementing them only when some of the students and their parents had expressed objections.

V.V.S. Iyer also as a kind of compromise stated that general mess-rule would be completely, compulsorily implemented henceforth and no exceptions would be granted to demanding students in the future. Iyer himself confessed that in spite of his reservations he had to permit the two Brahmin boys to eat separately because of the Brahmin centre in which the institution was located. The Brahmin leaders like T.S.S. Rajan, K.Santhanam argued that any inter-dining would prove highly sacrilegious and would particularly hurt the feelings of the highly religious Brahmin leaders, children and parents.
Gandhi and Commensal Restrictions

Both groups of adversaries chose to bring in Mahatma Gandhi as a mediator over this protracted problem. After a patient hearing, Gandhiji provided a compromise solution. He said that as the parents of the Brahmin boys of the institution insisted on separate dining for their wards, they should be allowed to dine separately. But in a mood and tone aimed at assuaging the wounded feelings of Non-Brahmin Congressmen Gandhi strictly stated that henceforth no student whose parents demanded separate commensal practices would be admitted into the Gurukulam and also students irrespective of caste affiliations should be treated with common mess rules. But both groups of adversaries did not accept Gandhian solution and Non-Brahmin were more aggrieved and considered Gandhian intervention as futile and tentative.

Congress Party and Gurukulam Controversy

Initially when the problem was brought to the notice of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee it established a committee consisting of some of the prominent members to investigate the issue. But the enquiry did not have a logical culmination as the Brahmin and Non-Brahmin rivals indulged in mutual recriminations. Then the controversy was taken up in the annual meeting of the TNCC held at Tiruchirappalli in 1925. Some of the Brahmin Congressmen opposed the deliberations in the meeting over the Gurukulam issue as they contended that the issue was outside the jurisdiction of TNCC. Ultimately because of the insistence of Non-Brahmin Congressmen the controversy figured in the deliberations of the TNCC. The forum proved to be a battlefield as both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins assiduously and polemically justified their collective postures on this Gurukulam imbroglio.

Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and his supporters sought to introduce a resolution which expressed the regret of the TNCC at having paid a considerable money to this iniquitous institution and an amendment proposed to this resolution by another Non-Brahmin went a
step further and wanted TNCC to recover the money from this recalcitrant institution. But this extreme resolution and the amendment were defeated. 72

The Brahmin faction led by Rajaji introduced their resolution, which explicitly deprecated public interference in the details of the internal management of the concerned institution. The resolution also sought to provide autonomy to the management of the Gurukulam to tackle the existing prejudices and practices by itself. At the same time, striking a compromise the resolution also advised the authorities of the Gurukulam to allow inter-dining without distinctions. But this resolution was defeated as it had support of only four members. 73

After the rejection of these two aforementioned resolutions, S. Ramanathan, a Non-Brahmin, brought in a new one. This resolution was finally approved by the TNCC. It contained two important features. Firstly, it said that the gradations of merit based on ascriptive factors like birth should not be observed in all organizations engaged in the national movement. The second feature of the resolution was more concrete and direct. It resolved to constitute a committee consisting of V. Thiagaraja Chettiar, S. Ramanathan and E.V. Ramasamy to oversee the implementation of the basic principle of this resolution. 74

In accordance with the letter and spirit of the resolution the committee went to visit the Gurukulam but all their efforts ended in a fiasco. The whole episode brought out in a crystal clear manner the intractable contradictions between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins and the obvious incapacity of the provincial Congress organization to tackle such an issue of enormous implications.

Jeevanandam, a Non-Brahmin congressman disappointed with the Gurukulam controversy established a new alternative ashram based on egalitarian principles at Siravayal near Karaikudi. He named the ashram as Gandhian ashram to indicate his continued faith in the Gandhian philosophy. The ashram paid attention to the cardinal principles of nationalism, egalitarianism, humanism and Gandhism. Under the aegis of
the ashram National Swadheshi Educational Schools, spinning centers and evening or night schools in colonies were established. The ashram paid special attention to education and empowerment of the disprivileged women and dalits of the community.\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{Communal Reservation and Tamil Congress}

The protracted problem of communal reservation afflicting the congress organization in the province reached its point of culmination in the Kanchipuram conference in 1925. The issue had been a longstanding, divisive one and occupied the limelight of previous annual conferences of the regional congress. The issue assumed such significant proportions that a separate organization of Non-Brahmins titled as Madras Presidency Association was established with the sole consideration of achieving communal reservation as discussed in the earlier pages.

The twenty fifth conference of the provincial congress held at Trichy witnessed heated deliberations over this issue. A group of Non-Brahmins led by E.V. Ramasamy, Varadharajalu Naidu, Joseph, SomasundaraBharathiar, Chidamparam Pillai, Kalyanasundara Muddaliyar etc., held a meeting of Non-Brahmins on the sidelines of the conference to deliberate over the adoption of communal reservation. As a sequel to this conference E.V. Ramasamy organized the second conference of Madras Presidency Association in Erode, his hometown.

The following year the 26\textsuperscript{th} annual conference of provincial congress was organized in Thirunelveli. The Non-Brahmins under the leadership of E.V. Ramasamy met separately and discussed about the adoption of communal reservation scheme not only in electoral, legislative institutions but also in governmental employment. The Non-Brahmin congressmen like Somasundaram Pillai, V.O. Chidamparam Pillai, Dhandapani Pillai took efforts to place the resolution on proportional reservation in the subject committee of the congress conference.\textsuperscript{76}
Hence E.V. Ramasamy attempted to impress on the president of the congress S. Kasthuri Iyengar the necessity and desirability of passing the resolution favouring reservation for Non-Brahmins in proportion to their population. The president in turn asked E.V. Ramasamy to make an alteration in the text of the resolution so that the word percentage would be replaced with the word adequately. The Non-Brahmin congressman, oblivious of the meaning of the word adequately innocuously asked Iyengar why that word should be replaced with the word adequately. In reply the Brahmin congressman told the Non-Brahmin congressman that both words meant the same but adequately was more reflective of the crux of the Non-Brahmin resolution. Though somewhat satisfied with the explanation the Non-Brahmin congressman went back only to find from others about the inadequacy of the word adequately to reflect the Non-Brahmin demands of proportional reservation. The dissatisfied Non-Brahmins asked the president of the provincial congress to bring the resolution in the subject committee in its original form. But the Brahmin congressman irked over the attitude of the Non-Brahmins totally decided to avoid the resolution from being discussed and passed in the subject committee. The Non-Brahmins disappointed with the obstructive attitude of Brahmins questioned the leaders about the rejection of their demand the Brahmin leaders justified the rejection by arguing that the Non-Brahmin resolution was against public interest. This resulted in acrimonious exchanges between the supporters and opponents of communal reservation in the provincial congress in its Thirunelveli session.

In 1921 the twenty seventh annual conference of the provincial congress was held at Thanjavur and on the sidelines a Tamil Non-Brahmin conference was also held as usual. In this meeting, it was decided to constitute a committee of Non-Brahmins to discuss the issue of communal reservation so that its substantive and procedural aspects could be discussed and implemented. The 28th Annual conference of the provincial congress was held at Tiruppur.

The 29th Annual conference of the provincial congress was held at Salem and when the Non Brahmins brought forth the issue of communal reservation the Brahmin
congress leader Rajaji persuaded the Non Brahmins not to press for the resolution at this juncture. The 30th annual conference of provincial congress was held at Thiruvannamalai and here again the Non-Brahmins attempted to highlight their long cherished dreams of securing communal safeguards.

**Kanjeepuram Conference**

The conference began its proceedings in an atmosphere palpable with tension and the president of the conference T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudhaliar discerning the tension filled atmosphere appealed to the delegates, in the beginning of the conference itself to maintain dignity and decorum in their deliberations. He passionately pleaded to the participants not to take to the path of violence and coercion during the proceedings and to fully adhere to the Gandhian methods in solving their mutual contradictions however intractable and dichotomous they were.

**Election of the Presiding Officer**

The Brahmin and Non-Brahmin division in the intra party domain of congress manifested itself in the election of the presiding officer of the Kanjeepuram conference itself. There were four candidates in the fray and among them three were non-Brahmins namely messors. Kalyanasundara Mudhaliar, Chakkarai Chettiar and Thangaperumal Pillai. The remaining contestant was a Brahmin called a Rangaswamy Iyengar. They were a total of 13 Congress District Committees, which would elect the president of the conference. While three of those District Congress Committees chose not to vote in the election of the presiding officer, the Madras District Congress Committee voted for Chakkarai Chettiar and Trichy District Congress Committee voted for Thangaperumal Pillai. Out of the remaining ten District Congress Committees four voted for the Brahmin leader and four voted for the Non-Brahmin leader Kalyanasundaranar resulting in a tie. But ultimately it was decided that Kalyanasundaranar would preside over the conference.
The Non-Brahmins led by Periyar considered the electoral support received by A. Rangaswamy Iyengar as manipulated and fraudulent one. They argued that the Salem District Congress Committee’s vote had been fraudulently handed to Iyengar’s side as the official congress committee of the district had not been properly convened and it had not officially cast its vote. Instead unofficially some members with vested interests had cast the vote of the District Committee through telegrams to the Provincial Congress Committee and even there they had not clearly opted for Iyengar as they had recommended not one but many names as their likely choice and the Brahmin leader had illegally pocketed the vote of that District Congress Committee. 79

Another district, which had supported Iyengar, was Kumbakonam District Congress Committee. The Non-Brahmins argued that there was no District Congress Committee in Kumbakonam and hence the vote was illegal and fallacious. Moreover the supposed vote of the imaginary District Congress Committee from Kumbakonam was delivered to the Provincial Congress Committee after the expiry of the official deadline and hence even if it was to be considered a genuine vote still it was to be disqualified. Hence the Non-Brahmin faction vehemently argued that Iyengar has received only two votes and not four as indicated in the official count. Periyar then launched a broadside at Iyengar as he had boycotted the Non-Cooperation Movement and had clandestinely cooperated with colonial government to achieve personal and sectional interests. He expressed his dismay at the electoral outcome that showed a parity of support between Iyengar who had defied Gandhian Non-cooperation and Kalyanasundaranar who had dedicated himself to implement Gandhian programmes in letter and spirit. He claimed that the manipulated parity would aggravate the Non-Brahmin hostility to Brahmin hegemony and advocated unified, planned counter action from Non-Brahmins. 80

The Subjects Committee of the Kanjeevaram conference was grappling with the issue of council entry. The Brahmin congressman Srinivasa Iyengar moved a resolution demanding that the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee recommend to the Kanpur session of AICC the adoption of the Swaraj party programme of council entry by the Indian National Congress. His resolution recommended that congress should conduct political
work more vigorously than the Swaraj party had hitherto done and should also carry on the campaign of capturing the councils and also said that the existence of the Swaraj party as a separate party was unnecessary in future.\textsuperscript{81}

When this resolution was discussed, Periyar and Ramanathan insisted that the associated question of communal representation should also be discussed simultaneously. But the subjects committee rejected their resolution demanding proportional representation on the basis of population strength for the Non-Brahmin communities. The subject committee also accepted that when the congress adopted the programme of the Swaraj party and undertook the election work in the succeeding year, a selection committee would be constituted to see that the interests of Non-Brahmins were safeguarded in the nomination of candidates.

Disappointed with the rejection of his resolution in the subjects committee Periyar decided to bring his rejected resolution in the main session itself which was granted permission by the presiding officer on the condition that it must have the support of 25 delegates. Periyar began to mobilize the support. But for obvious reasons the Brahmin congressman Srinivasa Iyanger decided abruptly to withdraw his original resolution that had heralded the resolution of Periyar. But Periyar was insistent that communal reservation principle should be adopted by the congress even if no proposal was in consideration for the adoption of council entry by Congress Party. The presiding officer of the conference did not allow the introduction of the communal reservation demand for discussion in the general session of the congress. The Periyar group interpreted this rejection as a manifestation of Brahmin intransigence and when critics pointed out that the presiding officer Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar was not a Brahmin, Periyar called him a stooge of Brahmin.\textsuperscript{82}
Non-Brahmin Meet

Periyar had extended an invitation to all the Non-Brahmins a week before the 31st Provincial Congress of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee through his journal to come and attend the Non-Brahmin get-together on the sidelines of the official congress conference. The invitation was extended to all Non-Brahmins irrespective of party affiliations. He called the Non-Brahmins to come forward to discuss the methods and contents of Non-Brahmin development. In his invitation Periyar appealed to those who considered abolition of untouchability as a fundamental brick of any egalitarian, democratic edifice to come and attend the conference. He went on to argue that abolition of untouchability alone would provide the congenial atmosphere to the Non-Brahmins to break out of the insidious tentacles of invidious Brahmanism.


E.V. Ramasamy proposed the name of T.A. Ramalinga Chettiar to preside over this Non-Brahmin conference and in his proposal speech, which was rather elaborate; he defended the convening of this conference. He stated that the conference would not work or scheme against any particular community and the objective was to discuss and formulate welfare measures for Non-Brahmins. He made a fervent appeal to the delegates to understand the principal causes of the conflicts between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins in the country in general and in the Tamil Nadu congress in particular. Such causes should be looked into so that timely action might be taken as otherwise the conflict of the interests between them would eat away the very vitals of the organization. “To deny the
very existence of the controversy altogether would be like binding the wound without treating it.”

He advocated as a remedy the succeeding resolution “… to accept the principal that in all offices and representative institutions Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and the so-called depressed classes shall have representation with due regard to their population strength and communicate this resolve to the national congress”.

He pointed out that Lucknow pact between Indian National Congress and Muslim League had accepted separate electorate and the principle of proportional representation heralding peace between Hindus and Muslims and hence proportional representation, if accepted in the south, would promote peace between the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins.

S. Ramanathan, another ardent advocate of proportional representation spoke passionately for providing justice to the Non-Brahmins including the untouchables. He drew a comparison between the Hindu-Muslim Conundrum of North India and the Non-Brahmin – Brahmin conflict in the south and delineated the imperative of providing adequate safeguards by the Congress Party to the Non-Brahmins and the depressed classes by providing measures similar to the Lucknow pact 1916. He further elaborated that this conflict was a protracted historical problem and not an aberration arising only in the 20th century. For him the resolution of this contradiction and sincere active promotion of parity between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins through the device of proportional representation could alone determine the evolution of a consolidated, invigorated nationalist struggle in this southern presidency. Proportional representation was the only talisman to this pestering problem and no other lackadaisical, lackluster and tentative remedies could solve this issue.

He candidly accepted that on innumerable occasions in the past he had openly castigated the strategy of proportional representation as being fissiparous and disruptive yet now after the bitter lessons of his experience he came to be convinced about the utility of such a measure. The intransigent and imperious attitude of the Brahmins had
been largely responsible for his ideological conversion on the issue of proportional representation. He demanded proportional representation not only for the welfare of the non-Brahmins but also the depressed classes as democratic elections would hardly ensure the adequacy of representation to these groups.²⁶

Another Non-Brahmin congressman O. Kandhasamy Chettiar in his speech attributed the failure of India to the fissiparous and exploitative caste structure. He opined that caste and religion were the two important demons afflicting the destiny of Indian nation and from this iniquitous and dehumanizing nature of caste in India the demands for proportional representation emanated was his assertion. He propounded that nationalism and social justice were the two pillars of freedom movement and any deliberate indifference to social justice would be detrimental to the concept of nationalism. He touched upon the sensitive issue of Non-Brahmin exploitation of the untouchable classes and emphasized the imperative of developing the depressed classes by attitudinal and ideological changes in Non-Brahmins towards them.

M. Ramabhadra Udaiyar, another Non-Brahmin congressman deplored the attitude of Brahmins in blaming the advocates of proportional representation as stooges of Justice Party. He advised the Brahmins to concede to the demand of proportional representation as only through this avenue Justice Party could be defeated forever and nationalism could be promoted in the country.²⁷

After these elaborate deliberations in the Non-Brahmin meeting a resolution was passed advising the Tamil Nadu Congress committee to field the candidates in the next general elections by reserving 90% of the seats to the Non-Brahmins. The resolution also said that one third of the Non-Brahmin seats should be reserved for the depressed classes.

But there was no appreciation or positive response from the congress leaders to these resolutions of congress Non-Brahmins thereby strengthening the beliefs and arguments of E.V. Ramasamy that Brahmin leaders because of their vested interests were
opposed to any measure that sought to improve the political fortunes of the majority Non-Brahmin community.

**Varnashrama Dharma, Gandhiji and Congress Politics**

Mahatma Gandhi, a firm believer in the traditional tenets of Hindu social structure, regularly expressed his inner thoughts on the necessity and utility of the *Varnashrama* Dharma. Adding greatly to the dismay of Non-Brahmins in the Tamil areas, he extolled the great virtues and contributions of Brahmins to the evolution and growth of Indian civilization and culture. Mahatma's pronouncements on the much-despised Varna system precipitated a bitter controversy and acrimonious protest from the Non-Brahmins in the province.

In the beginning of the third decade of the 20th century Mahatma Gandhi delivered a laudatory speech in Madras about the immensity of contribution from Brahmins to Indian culture, society etc. He said that Hinduism owed its all to the great tradition established by the Brahmins. He also said that as a class Brahmins had shown extraordinary sense of self-sacrifice and had played the role of custodian of the purity of Hindu way of life with exemplary spirit and dedication.88

His profusely appreciative speech invited strong protest and indignation from the Non-Brahmins. They smarting under the dilatory tactics of Brahmins over the adoption of communal reservation officially in the party strongly reacted to this pro-Brahmin speech of Gandhiji. A nationalist Non-Brahmin wrote a letter to Young India commenting that Gandhiji had exhibited his complete ignorance and indifference about the contribution of Non-Brahmins to Indian cultural traditions. He also took umbrage at the fact that Gandhiji had consciously ignored the causative factors of the Non-Brahmin Movement in the south.

In a disconnected tone he advised Gandhiji to avoid exacerbating the Brahmin-Non-Brahmin controversy in the south as otherwise the Non-cooperation Movement
would be affected considerably, especially because of the prevailing anti-Brahmin, anti-varnashrama dharma attitudes and beliefs of the majority of the people in the South.⁸⁹

This controversy was short lived and the disappointments generated by this episode in the minds of Non-Brahmin Congressmen evaporated quickly without causing any noticeable damage to the Indian National Congress. But it foretold the larger, more deleterious and protracted imbroglio which was to afflict the party later in the decade. Gandhiji paid a visit to South India in 1927 where he again expressed encomiums on the services of Brahmins to Indian culture and in the ensuing controversy a large group of Congress Non-Brahmins broke away from the party. Even before the materialization of the tour the anti Brahmin E.V. Ramasamy had openly written in his papers that the Brahmins who were in dire straits now would somehow resuscitate themselves and through their ingenious power they would bring Mahatma to help themselves to come out of their present moribund conditions.⁹⁰ Gandhiji's pronouncement confirmed in the eyes of the suspecting Non-Brahmins that Gandhiji had been brought here by the ingenious Brahmins to strengthen their threatened supremacy.

Addressing a public meeting in a town in North Arcot District Gandhi again eulogized Brahmins as the repositories of knowledge and embodiment of sacrifice. Realizing the existence of Brahmin-Non-Brahmin disharmony in the Tamil areas Gandhiji in the same speech provided his advice to both the protagonists of the conflict. While he advised the Brahmins to adhere to their tradition of austerity and abstinence, to told Non-Brahmins not to destroy the fundamental principles of Hindu social structure. Gandhi described the Varnashrama Dharma as a universal law and a law of spiritual economics designed to set free man's energy for higher pursuits in life.⁹¹

Though he rejected the notion of higher and lower status attached to the system yet he accepted the fourfold classification of caste by the duties to be performed in the difference stages of one's life. These Gandhian reinforcements on the delicate issue of Varnashrama Dharma precipitated protests from the Non-Brahmins of both Congress and no-Congress segments. A. Ramasamy Mudaliar, a spokesman of the Justice Party
sarcastically characterized Gandhiji's delineation of Varnashrama Dharma as "Gandhi Ashrama Dharma". He succinctly summed up the Non-Brahmin feelings on this issue. "It is not Mahatma Gandhi's Varnashrama Dharma that the world is concerned with but that the Non-Brahmins are fighting against the Varnashrama Dharma which exists today in Southern India and which forces them to accept unnumbered degradations." 92

The controversy generated intra-Congress dissensions too and several-seasoned Non-Brahmin Congressmen protested against Gandhian ideas on Varnashrama Dharma. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar, an ardent supporter of Mahatma said that Gandhi's interpretation of Vamashrama Dharma would be a detriment to individuality and hence it should not be favoured in the contemporary social milieu.

Another Non-Brahmin Congress leader R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar who later became the first finance minister of post-independence India too criticized Gandhian views. He said that Gandhiji had not stopped at saying that Brahmin-Non-Brahmin problem was beyond his comprehension but had proceeded to extol the hidden virtues of Varnashrama Dharma as he perceived but whatever he imported into it ordinary people would understand it only in one way viz., the accepted shastraic implications of the several rungs in the ladder of Hindu social politics. 93

E.V. Ramaswamy, a dyed in the wool anti Brahmin reacted to Gandhian statement on Varnashrama Dharma with extreme anger and disappointment. Throughout the preceding decade, he implacably and relentlessly attacked Varnashrama Dharma and hence he could not digest the encomiums heaped on Brahmans. Though he was aware of Gandhian proclivities on this contentious issue, still he believed but these were transient transgressions in an otherwise noble philosophy of Mahatma. He was prepared to forgo these temporary aberrations for the sake of realizing the Gandhian ideals of national reconstruction and regeneration. He adhered to the thought that once Gandhian reconstruction programmes were implemented untouchability would also be eliminated. In 1925 itself in an article titled as Gandhiji and Varnashrama Dharma E.V. Ramasamy
had stated that Gandhiji by supporting Varnashrama Dharma unintentionally had put at peril his noble mission of untouchability eradication.  

Once Gandhiji made his views once again clear in 1927, E.V. Ramasamy started to attack him more pungently and devastatingly. He wrote that untouchability was beyond the realm of comprehension of Mahatma Gandhi. He believed that the obsession of Gandhiji with religion and Varnashrama Dharma might bring him popularity and influence but definitely would be detrimental to implement his noble objective of eradicating untouchability. E.V. Ramasamy forcefully argued that untouchability continued to exist and survive only because of the legitimacy enjoyed by Varnashrama Dharma. He adumbrated that Varnashrama Dharma was the body in which the life of untouchability existed and once the body was destroyed the life too would be destroyed.

In the backdrop of such a contentious conundrum E.V.Ramasamy and Ramanathan, the two Non-Brahmin Congressmen decided to meet Gandhiji in person to explain to him the inadequacy and futility of the Varna order. They put forth their arguments and demands to Gandhiji, which they believed would usher in reconstruction and development of India eradicating untouchability. They demanded the destruction of Congress, Hinduism and Brahmanism. They believed that only through these measures untouchability could be eradicated and real freedom and Swaraj would be realized. But predictably Gandhiji rejected these demands of the rebellious Non-Brahmin Congressmen of the South. Hence they left the meeting with Gandhiji dejected and decided to work to achieve these objectives outside the Congress organization.  

Consequent to the breakdown of the talks he had with Gandhiji E.V. Ramasamy stopped addressing Gandhiji as Mahatma. He began to address him as only Mr. Gandhi. When the Non-Brahmin nationalist paper Tamil Nadu criticized E.V. Ramasamy for addressing Gandhiji by name, he replied by stating that the Gandhian adherence to the patently illogical and socially iniquitous Varnashrama Dharma forced him to give up addressing him as Mahatma as in his opinions no Mahatma would consciously support the anachronistic and iniquitous Varnashrama Dharma. He attacked
Gandhiji’s views as they strengthened the obstinate adherence of Brahmins to obsolete ideas of privilege and caste purity.

Making a frontal assault on Mahatma’s speech in Mysore E.V. Ramasamy argued that Gandhian advocacy of Varna based professions even if devoid of any superiority or inferiority feelings as claimed by him would still be unnecessary and redundant as there was no need for any individual or group to engage in Varnashrama Dharma prescribed professions. He also attacked Gandhiji by stating that in Tamil social system the intermediate rungs of Rajputs and Vaishyas were absent and hence Gandhian Varnashrama Dharma here if applied would be completely inappropriate and would perpetuate only the prevailing Brahmin supremacy and corresponding Sudra subservience.

He pointed out the fundamental flaws and dichotomy between Gandhian theory and practice on Varnashrama Dharma as any true adherence to that ideal by Gandhiji would automatically disqualify him from the participation in public life or freedom struggle as being a vaishya himself Gandhi should engage in the profession of commerce and trade, and not political struggle or public service.96

Another aspect of Gandhian arguments on Varnashrama Dharma that angered E.V. Ramasamy was the Gandhian advice that the responsibility of Brahmin varna was to fulfill the public service. He wondered that if Brahmins could satisfy their varna responsibility by engaging in public service, then the Non-Brahmins should be engaged only in agricultural and other menial services as their varna prohibited them from engaging in public services.

As Non-Brahmin opposition to his elucidation of Varnashrama Dharma became widespread and vocal Gandhiji made an attempt to clear their misgivings and apprehensions. During the controversial tour of 1927 Gandhiji said to a gathering "As you are aware, though a Non-Brahmin myself I have lived more of my life with them and in their midst, than amidst Non-Brahmins and on that account some of my Non-Brahmin
friends suspect me of having all my colourings from Brahmin friends”. Later on he conclusively sought to reaffirm his conviction that Varnashrama Dharma was not only one of the foundations on which Hindu society was built but also that it defined man’s mission on earth.

These repeated assertions of his convictions on the highly contentious issue of Varnashrama Dharma created enormous fissures in the Congress unit of the province and proved to be the coup de grace to E. V. Ramasamy’s departure from Congress Party altering the political landscape of Madras Presidency.

**Reaction of Jeevanandham**

During his visit to the south Gandhiji paid a visit to the Gandhi ashram of Jeevanandam at Siravayal and as the varna system controversy was still burning the Non-Brahmin congressman Jeevanandam entered into an argument with Mahatma over the nature, structure and utility of the system. Unconvinced by the Gandhian explanations the Non-Brahmin congressman began to condemn the outdated and inegalitarian features of Hinduism. Subsequently Jeevanandam and the conservative president of his Gandhi ashram who had supported Gandhian beliefs on Varnashrama Dharma had a heated debate on the question of hierarchy verses equality and Jeevanandam decided to walk out of this ashram to form his own new ashram called Truth Explaining Society at Nachiapuram in the neighborhood of Siravayal.

Jeevanandam started to adhere to both the nationalist values of Congress and the self-respect values of Periyar. He wholeheartedly supported the Self Respect Movement of the former congressman Periyar. While attending the conference of the Self Respect Movement in Erode Jeevgandam advocated the inculcation of Self Respect in all the dimensions of life. He asked congressmen to believe and practiced the values of rationalism, equality, humanism and self-respect.
Later on he was attracted by the Pure Tamil Movement and promoted Tamilization of Tamils. He himself jettisoned his Sanskrit name and adopted a pure Tamil name. He advocated a steadfast opposition to the influence of Sanskrit on Tamil life. He also attacked caste system vigorously and the issue of untouchability came under concentrated attack from him. Already when he was a child he had shown anti-untouchability beliefs as he had admitted the members of the depressed classes in his football team, literary organizations etc.

Therefore, rationalism, Tamil Spirit, equality, humanism and self-respect values heavily influenced Jeevanandam, yet he was different from Periyar as he remained a congressman. In 1939 he was elected with a huge majority of votes to the All India Congress Committee but in the coming decades he was to sever his connection with regionalism to move in the path of communist movement.

Coimbatore Conference of Justice Party

The Legislative council elections conducted in 1926 was pleasing to the Congress-Khilafat Swaraj party as it captured 41 seats in the presidency and correspondingly the performance of the Justice Party was highly disappointing as it was able to register only 31 victories. Though there were voices within the defeated Justice Party about the imperatives of organizational restructuring and fresh infusion of youthful energy and persons yet the party was overwhelmed with the flood of despondency. In its search to maintain the electoral relevance in the province the Justice Party instead fighting Congress Party and Gandhian activities chose to get assimilated into them. The dejected party started undergoing an ideological 'Gandhisisation' and 'Congressization' process as it sought to adopt a number of popular policies of Congress and Mahatma Gandhi.

In the Madurai Confederation of the party held to conduct a post mortem of the electoral performance the conference pandal was decorated with the placards reading 'Long live Mahatma Gandhi'. At the same confederation an exhibition of Khaddar was
also opened and resolutions were also passed urging the cadres of the party to adopt the Gandhian hand woven cloth.  

The Gandhian programme of reconstruction and national regeneration including the removal of untouchability, implementation of prohibition, were also adopted as the chief ideological ingredients of the party. A lot of leaders of Justice Party strongly propounded in the Subjects Committee of the Madurai confederation that Justice Party members should invade and join the Congress Party so that they could overwhelm the party with Non-Brahmins and dethrone the Brahmin supremacy of the Congress. But as the proposals were fresh and minds of most leaders of Justice Party were unprepared these proposals failed to get passed in the confederation.

But how profound and irresistible the process of Gandhizisation had penetrated into the mental makeup of Justice Party was revealed tellingly in the Mayavaram conference of the party in the same year. Here the fact that the portrait of party’s opponent Mahatma Gandhi was opened was an evident indication of the party being overwhelmed by Gandhian charisma. When the leader of the Justice Party Raja of Panagal used the word Mr. Gandhi the people on the platform protested vociferously and egged on him to call him Mahatma Gandhi, which he steadfastly refused. Still in the same conference the Justice Party towering leader admitted that "whether one agreed with his political views or not there was absolutely no doubt that there was a great force behind him."  

Though the party was able to prevent the passage of a formal resolution authorizing its members to join its bitter opponent, Congress Party in the Madurai confederation, still the events of the succeeding months proved that the party’s resistance would be only short-lived, tentative and transitory.

A Special Confederation of the Justice Party met at Coimbatore in the month of July in 1927 to expressly deliberate over that question of joining the Congress Party. To this conference the party had invited three important Congressmen of Non-Brahmin background namely Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, E.V. Ramasamy and T.V. Kalyanasundaranar. This confederation passed three important resolutions. The foremost
resolution was the one authorizing the members to join the Congress Party and similar organizations. The party was not about to lose altogether its identity as the resolution stated that though it was permissible for willing Non-Brahmins to join the Congress, the individuality of the party should be maintained. This resolution, it is pertinent to recollect, was brought in by V. Chakkarai Chetti, the former member of Madras Presidency Association. The unanimously passed resolution was discussed primarily so that harmony, coordination and cooperation could be established and maintained between Non-Brahmins of Justice Party and Congress Party. 104

The Congressman and one of the special invitees to the confederation E.V. Ramasamy was blatant and forthcoming in his attacks on Brahmins in his speech. He condemned the appointment of a Brahmin as the law member of the Executive council and even pressed for a resolution to be passed in the confederation to recall the Governor of Madras for being a stooge of Brahmins. The conference witnessed Congressmen and Justice leaders alike discussing the issue of Brahmanism and communal representation. V.O. Chidamparam Pillai, the Congress extremist of yesteryears also participated in the deliberations actively. In the course of the speech, he analyzed the condition of the Non-Brahmins, communal representation in government job and also the influence of Brahmins in the Congress. He said that 'the Non-Brahmins were the originators of the Congress but now the powers are in the hands of the Brahmins. The present move is to get back that power. The Congress had among its members eminent patriots (Non-Brahmins) working hard for self-government. Should the Non-Brahmins of the Justice Party, sit in deliberations with these Non-Brahmins and work for the attainment of Swaraj, the Congress would not get away from the idea of communal representation. As long as various classes and communities existed in India, without any hesitation they should join the Congress" 105 Kumarasamy Reddiar, the Chairman of the special confederation argued that Justice Party should be permitted to enter Congress so that they could capture and use it for Non-Brahmin ends.
Failed Reunion

The current of infusion of regional opponents into Congress found another manifestation when Rajaji made attempts of reunion to his bitter political rival and intimate personal friend E.V. Ramasamy. The later was arrested and imprisoned in Coimbatore jail by the colonial administration on the charges of sedition in 1933. The Congress leader Rajaji was also imprisoned in that prison though on a different case of participating in the nationalist agitations. There Rajaji invited his old friend to rejoin Congress and an approving Periyar discussed with him some fundamental principles of convergence. The two leaders arrived a compromise and Rajaji accepted that Congress Party in governmental employment should accept communal representation. Moreover Rajaji promised to get the concurrence of Gandhiji to the readmission of Periyar and his followers. When Gandhiji during his visit stayed in the house of R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar in Coimbatore Rajaji approached him with the proposal of Periyar's reunion with Congress. But Gandhiji was out rightly reluctant to accept communal representation and hence the attempted reunion of Periyar and Congress failed.

But Periyar from the beginning was lukewarm in his attitude towards the proposal as he was firmly convinced that even if Gandhiji and Rajaji accepted the demand for communal representation the intransient Brahmins would work to sabotage such moves. Periyar considered communal reservation as the cardinal ingredient of his social reform scheme and was accordingly determined to pursue it along with Congress if Congress accepted the principle and without Congress or even in opposition to Congress if Congress declined to accept it.

Though the attempt failed efforts to bring him back into Congress fold were continued by the TNCC. In 1934 the Tamil Nadu provincial Congress Conference was held in Coimbatore in 1934 and Rajaji in his speech welcomed infusion of self-respecters into Congress Party. He asked the Congress leaders not to ignore these incoming self-respecters into the Congress fold on the grounds of past contradictions and controversies.
He echoed the sentiments of Non-Brahmin Congressmen in welcoming these self-respecters.\textsuperscript{108}

Periyar was in an enviable position in the politics of the Presidency as both Congress and Justice Party made concerted efforts to bring him into their respective spheres of influence. He drafted a ten point programme by introducing modifications in his earlier scheme of social reconstruction called Erode programme and presented the modified scheme to both Congress and Justice Party.\textsuperscript{109}

This programme included the following:
1. Reduction of the exorbitant salaries of bureaucracy
2. Nationalization of important sectors
3. Establishment of cooperative institutions
4. Removal of indebtedness of agriculturists
5. Provision of minimum education to all children within a fixed period, proportional representation in government appointments.
6. Separation of religion from politics
7. Imposition of progressive taxation
8. Decentralization of power
9. Simplification of legal procedures
10. Endowment of more legislative power with legislatures.

The Congress Party rejected this ten-point programme of Periyar paving the way for the permanent exclusion of Periyar from the party. The Justice Party accepted these ten points and hence he joined the justice stream.

**Elections and Non-Brahmanisation of Congress**

As elections were announced to implement the provincial autonomy granted by the 1935 Government of India Act, the All India Congress Parliamentary Board gave guidelines for the choice of candidates for the party. Signing of Congress pledge, financial
capability and winnability prospects were important criteria to be considered to choose the candidates. But the provincial Congress committee decided to provide preponderant consideration to the winnability of candidates and in the context of growing non-brahmanisation and regional assertions Non-Brahmins were given more seats. Not only Congress Non-Brahmins who actively participated in the nationalist struggle but even others who, though not having any or adequate experience in Congress movement but possessed winning prospects were given tickets. This prospective situation invited an arrival of numerous Non-Brahmins into Congress Party subsequently contributing to the onward process of non-brahmanisation of the party in the province.

Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu who in the past decade was closely associated with Justice Party was inducted into the Congress Party just before the elections. His induction was significant as he was toying with the idea of mobilizing anti-Congress opinions to form a powerful alternative to Congress just weeks before the elections. S. Ramanathan who defected from the Congress along with Periyar into Self Respect Movement came back to the party and was fielded in the elections in the Tanjore constituency. In fact he was made a minister in the subsequent Rajaji Ministry. Dr. Subbarayan, the Zamindar from Salem district, the Chief Minister of Madras in the previous decade joined Congress Party and was chosen as Congress candidate from Salem. Sittaram Reddi, a justice stalwart from South Arcot joined Congress and was put up as a candidate from Cuddalore. V.I. Munusami Pillai, who was nominated by the Governor to sit along with Justice Party members in the Legislative Council of Madras earlier was inducted and put up as a candidate from a reserved constituency in South Arcot. In fact he was made a Minister later to provide representation to Schedule Caste Communities. T.A. Ramalingam Chetty, a wealthy banker from Coimbatore region was welcomed into Congress to be put up as a candidate in the elections.

Congress Ministry and Non-Brahmin Grievances

The formation of the Congress Ministry under the leadership of Rajaji in the Madras Presidency as a result of the implementation of the 1935 Government of India Act invited
strident and trenchant criticism from Non-Brahmins as they perceived the composition of the ministry as an indication of the resurgence of Brahmin domination in the political scenario of the province. They were evidently dissatisfied with the considerable, even preponderant representation and allocation of significant portfolios to the Brahmins in the Council of Ministers. The Congress Non-Brahmins took exception to the inclusion of a controversial Brahmin from Tiruchirappalli in the ministry as he had been only recently condemned as a renegade by both provincial and All India Congress Committees, Congress Working Committee etc. His role in the party affairs especially in the turbulent local government politics in the centrally located district of Trichy had been controversial and rebellious in the preceding three years and in this backdrop his induction into the Congress Ministry provoked strident criticism from not only Non-Brahmins of Justice Party but also Congress Non-Brahmins.

There was an intense and vitriolic rivalry between T.S.S. Rajan, a Brahmin Congressman, one of the closest and most enduring associates of Rajaji and Ratnavelu Thevar, a Non-Brahmin Congressman. The later, a lawyer by profession had once being the Secretary of the local Justice branch in the city and had also unsuccessfully competed in the elections to Madras Legislative council in the past from Justice Party platform. Though he had opposed the Gandhian and civil disobedience movements, he defected to the Congress Party in 1934, which welcomed him as an influential local notable and a valuable recruit for the contest against the Justice Party. He rapidly consolidated his positions in the organizational structure of the Congress in the city by assiduously exploiting anti-Brahmin and anti-Muslim feelings in the town. T.S.S. Rajan considered Ratnavelu Thevar as a bitter rival as he estimated him as a 'man of strong hates and bitter communalism'. When TNCC nominated Thevar as its candidate to the chairmanship of the Municipal Council the rival faction led by T.S.S. Rajan revolted and in alliance and coordination with independent councilors caused his defeat. Both the Provincial Congress Committee and All India Committee condemned the rebellious actions of the Rajan faction.
Rajaji was furious over the revolt in Trichy and even announced in the rightful display of disgust his resignation from Congress. He told Mahatma Gandhi that he was more pained over the rebellion in Trichy as just before the elections he pleaded personally with Rajan not to violate the discipline of the party. He said 'I have no heart to be pretending any longer that we can build up organized work on party discipline. A man of Dr. Rajan's position having done this I can not lift my head and speak the language of party politics, collect funds or take pledges or do anything now in the elections or in the Congress Committees.. It is worse than a vote of censure.'\textsuperscript{115} As a result Rajan resigned all his positions in the Congress organization and disassociated himself completely from Congress politics in August 1936.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned controversy the Congress nominated the recalcitrant Rajan as a member of the Legislative Council and inducted him as Minister for Health. Rajaji in an explanatory move defended his inclusion on the ground that 'his non-inclusion would have been suicidal.' The Non-Brahmin Congressmen expressed profusely their indignation at the inclusion of such a recalcitrant member in the ministry. S. Narayanasamy Raja, a member of Lalgudi Taluk Congress Committee in the controversial Trichy District addressed a complaint to the All India Congress Committee and urged the President to investigate the circumstances that led to the inclusion of Rajan in the Ministry. He in his complaint suggested that his appointment smacked of communalism.\textsuperscript{116}

Another Non-Brahmin Congressman S.V. Ramaswamy, the Secretary of Dharmapuram District Board directly attributed Rajan's appointment to Brahmanism. He accused Rajaji of sectarianism, autocracy and communalism in including Rajan as a Minister and defending the unjustifiable decision. He wrote in the letter, 'The nomination of Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, a gentleman belonging to the same sub sect as the leader, for the special purpose of making him the leader of the Upper House and a Minister, is a very bad precedent. Are there no competent hands in the Upper House among the elected members? It is gross insult to them and still a grosser insult to the Non-Brahmin members of that House. Dr. Rajan is a person against whom disciplinary action had been taken. If
his disobedience and disloyalty are so lightly to be treated, with what grace would the leader enforce discipline against other members?117

The anti-Brahmin *Viduthalai* of E.V.R. published the Tamil version of his complaining letter which was originally published in *Sunday Observer* and Periyar portrayed the Non-Brahmin Congressman's complaint as a vindication of the Brahmin manipulation and machination to perpetuate their supremacy. The Tamil Nadu Congress committee after receiving this tendentious complaint reacted with promptness and severity and suspended the author of this complaint for three years from all Congress activities and his primary membership of the party was terminated. This protracted and insistent attitude of the Non-Brahmin Congressman against the Brahmin intransigence in the Congress Party revealed the pestering wound of Brahmin-Non-Brahmin conflict.

**Anti-Hindi Agitation and Congress Politics**

The Congress Ministry under the premiership of Rajaji decided to introduce compulsory Hindi education in schools in the province from 1937 onwards. This controversial decision of the government precipitated an intense struggle between the nationally influential Brahmins and regionally assertive Non-Brahmins. This intense flare up enveloped not only the general politics of the province but also the intra-party domain of the Congress Party. The Hindi controversy prominently assumed the communal colour of Brahmin-Non-Brahmin rivalry as majority of its staunch supporters hailed from the Brahmin castes and majority of the opponents hailed from the Non-Brahmin segments of the society. The arguments advocated by both groups also reinforced the communal angle of the intense controversy.

The premier and his loyal supporters advocated a plethora of reasons to justify the imposition of compulsory Hindi education. They argued that the replacement of English by a national language as the lingua franca of India was a paramount requisite. They strongly advocated that the adoption of Hindi as the lingua franca of India would be conducive to the realization of Swaraj in the fullest term.118 They defended their decision
to choose Hindi as indigenous alternative to foreign English as among the bewildering variety of languages of India Hindi was spoken by the largest number of people. Moreover they honestly believed that the adoption of Hindi as national official language would promote communal harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. Some of the Congress leaders who happened to be Brahmins supported Hindi implementation on the controversial ground that it could be conducive to the establishment of revived Sanskrit as spoken language of the masses.\footnote{119}

Unconvinced by the plethora of supporting arguments brought out by the Congress Party and Brahmin leaders the Non-Brahmins began to express their resentment through demonstrations and struggles. They equated Hindi with Brahmins and Brahmanism. Almost all the prominent Non-Brahmin groups and organizations came out strongly against Hindi policy with the profusely declared principles of protecting Tamil language and culture. The Executive Committee of the moribund Justice Party passed a resolution opposing the introduction of compulsory Hindi in schools as it was unnecessary and harmful to South Indian languages.\footnote{120} The firebrand anti-Brahmin leader of the Self Respect Movement Periyar plunged into the struggle with a clarion call asking people to fight for the cause of Tamil language and culture. He was arrested and prosecuted for his inflammatory anti Hindi speech. It was during the course of anti Hindi agitation E.V. Ramasamy was affectionately bestowed with the title of Periyar in Tamil meaning the great man by the women protagonists of the anti Hindi movement.\footnote{121}

**The Revolt of Somasundara Bharathiyar**

The most prominent personality from the Congress organization who revolted against the Rajaji scheme of compulsory Hindi was Somasundara Bharathiar, the Professor of Tamil Department at the Annamalai University in Chidamparam. His implacable opposition revealed that the opponents of Hindi implementation programme were not enemies of Hindi language as such but only ardent lovers of Tamil language. The fact that he was closely associated with the Hindi propagation activity in his University where he had welcomed the opening of Hindi Pracharak Sabha and had even conducted membership
drives for the admission of students in that Sabha is a clear remainder of the assertion that
the opponents of Hindi implementation scheme were not genetically predisposed to Hindi
baiting.

The Professor was a staunch Congressman coming from the family of Congress
convictions and connections. He was associated closely with the Swadeshi Steam
Navigation Company adventure of V.O. Chidamparam Pillai during the Swadeshi
Movement period. He was active in the anti-Rowlett agitation in the Madras Presidency
in late 1910s. He had organized an important meeting in Tirunelveli in the South of the
State where the important Congressmen of the State including Satyamoorthy, Srinivasa
Iyengar and Annie Besant participated and deliberated on the Chelmsford Reforms. He
also conducted in the mid twenties a conference in Madurai, which was attended by
Chittaranjan Doss, the leader of the Congress-Khilafat Swaraj party. He had abundant
faith in Gandhian leadership and tactics and mobilized funds for the organization of Civil
Disobedience Movement in the South.122

Notwithstanding his nationalist association and commitment he protested
vehemently at the compulsory introduction of Hindi by Rajaji Ministry. He presided over
the Provincial Tamil conference held at Trichy in December 1937 to register the
opposition of Tamils against compulsory Hindi implementation programme. 65
distinguished invitees, 646 delegates, 536 visitors, 105 Reception Committee members
and over 800 ordinary members attended this stirring conference.123 In his Presidential
address Bharathi spoke passionately against Hindi implementation. The conference
established a committee consisting of Somasundara Bharathiar, E.V Ramasamy and
Umamaheswaran Pillai, the President of Karanthai Tamil Sangam and was given the
responsibility of meeting the Governor of Madras to explain him "the great consternation
and discontent that had roused the anger of the Tamils consequent on the dictatorial and
undemocratic methods pursued by the present ministry in the matter of making Hindi a
compulsory subject of study in public schools, as it is calculated to prevent the
educational advancement of the people and cause great harm to the Tamil language and
culture."124
The conference presided over by Bharathi also resolved to demand the immediate formation of a Tamil homogenous province incorporating all the Tamil speaking areas and early creation of a Tamil University especially meant to foster the growth of Tamil language. The conference witnessed the creation of a new association titled Tamilian Association consisting of 38 members and Somasundara Bharathi was one of the important members of the association. As the Rajaji government seemed to be intransigent, Somasundara Bharathi convened the executive committee of the Tamilian Association in Trichy to discuss the means and methods to be adopted to prevent the adamant government from going ahead with Hindi implementation. This meeting due to the efforts of Bharathi witnessed the inauguration of a Madras Provincial Anti-Hindi Leage, which would lead the anti-Hindi campaign in the coming days in front of the schools where Hindi was proposed to be introduced. Many sub-committees were also formed by the anti-Hindi league and their function was to request Headmasters of institutions not to introduce compulsory Hindi and also to appeal to the parents not to send their children to such schools where compulsory Hindi was introduced.

The association of Hindi and Sanskrit made by some Congress Brahmin leaders provoked Bharathi to look at the whole issue as a conspiracy to promote Sanskrit and to denigrate Tamil. Somasundara Bharathi objected to the attempt to make all the pupils, irrespective of their culture, to learn Hindi as a first step towards learning Sanskrit later on, because Hindi was step to be the 'Spoken Sanskrit'. While delivering a speech at Triplicane, Bharathi said that on account of an admixture of the Aryan language the status of Tamil had become low and with the introduction of compulsory Hindi the Tamil language, already in a ruined state would not even be in existence in some years. Bharathi also accepted the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy and the need to look at Hindi imposition through that prism. He said 'it is a sheer camouflage to say that the Tamils have no cultural differences with their Aryan brethren. Not only the Aryanised North Indian communities have lived apart for centuries without close contact and sharp differences and contrasts between them noticeable in every sphere and activity of communal life such cultural, linguistic, social and racial: but the way south Indian
Brahmins have been deliberately striving to keep alive the consciousness of their racial segregation and cultural isolation. Bharathi also criticized the controversial proposals on grounds of inner-party democracy. He pointed out that the decision to introduce compulsory Hindi had not been discussed and decided by either the Congress unit in the State or All India Congress Committee.

Somasundara Bharathi wrote a missive to the Premier when, even in the face of overwhelming opposition from Tamils the government was adamant on the Hindi issue. The summarization of the letter from Somasundara Bharathi would mean:

1) I am in a situation where I will struggle and resist any attempt, which aims to undermine the basic rights of the Tamil people, the uniqueness of Tamil language and the glory of Tamil and Dravidian civilization.

2) No north Indian leader has any right or legitimacy to introduce compulsory Hindi in the educational institutions of Tamil areas. You also don’t have any credentials to introduce this compulsory Hindi scheme.

3) In the past many centuries immutable differences have evolved between the people north of Vindyas and the people of south. Ethnicity, art, literature, history etc. are different on both sides of Vindyas. Hence the language of one region should not be imposed through the instrument of coercion on the people of the other side of the Vindyas.

4) You have neither consulted leaders of the Tamil community nor their scholars before embarking on this compulsory Hindi adventure. Many literary scholars like Dr. Viswanatha Iyer have claimed that you had not had consultation with them before deciding to introduce Hindi.

5) The compulsory introduction of Hindi will be more detrimental to the Tamil language and culture and more harmful than the role of the English language.
Tamils believe that Hindi will suck up the blood and life out of Tamil language and community.

6) Your campaign that Hindi will not replace Tamil as a substitute doesn’t carry any convictions with Tamils.

7) Your thoughts and programmes will spell doom for Tamils in more than one way and the main objective of this letter is to bring this bitter fact to your notice.129

Views of T.V. Kalyanasundaranar

T.V. Kalyanasundaranar a stanch congressman of Non-Brahmin origin too disapproved the Hindi programme of the Rajaji Government. At a social get-together organized in the house of Mr. Chockalingam, the editor of the Tamil newspaper *Dinamani* the premier approached Kalyanasundaranar and solicited his support for the congress government in the face of heavy opposition on the Hindi issue. The Non-Brahmin congressman suggested to the premier that the Hindi language should be made optional and not mandatory to defuse the situation. But the premier was adamant on the Hindi issue, as he believed that retreating to make Hindi optional then would undermine the status and authority of the government. So he solicited Kalyanasundaranar’s explicit support on this issue. But the Non-Brahmin congressman politely but firmly declined to support the premier on the issue of compulsory Hindi implementation.130 Another Non-Brahmin congressman the nationalist’s poet Ramalingam Pillai was also against the compulsory nature of the Hindi policy of the Rajaji Government.

Gandhian Intervention and Non-Brahmin Reaction

The Rajaji administration invoked the much-despised Criminal Law Amendment Act against the anti-Hindi agitators. The Congress Party had made pledges to the people that it would annul and repeal the oppressive and draconian laws of British colonial administration if elected to power in the 1937 elections. The Criminal Law Amendment
Act was one such widely criticized law. But the congress government invoking this law to punish the anti-Hindi agitators created widespread discontent and rancour among Non-Brahmin congressmen. Even Brahmin public personalities of the time had protested against the application of this law by Rajaji ministry.

A section of the Non-Brahmins wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi drawing his attention to the controversial application of the obnoxious law to punish the agitators. Mahatma Gandhi out rightly rejected the complaints of Non-Brahmin congressmen and characterized the cry of anti-Hindi agitation that mother tongue was in danger as being either ignorant or hypocritical.

He not only condoned the invoking of the controversial law but also chided the Non-Brahmins to desist from thinking along parochial lines. The not so emollient reply of Gandhiji precipitated a lot of rancour and antagonism among the Non-Brahmins both within and outside congress. Many congressmen including N.V. Natarajan, the secretary of the Madras District Congress Committee quite their posts in the Tamilnadu Congress Committee and joined in a vociferous and articulate manure the anti-Hindi movement.

Some Non-Brahmin congressmen like Somasundara Bharathi began to consider Mahatma Gandhi not as Mahatma but as a politician from North India who was interested only in the substitution of British rule with North Indian rule. There were calls pleading Non-Brahmins to renounce their complete faith in Gandhian leadership and national movement. Somasundara Bharathi wondered that Mahatma could become the leader of a nation like India but not a language called Tamil.

Singaravelu Chettiar

He was an advocate and an active congressman in Madras city. He had gone to prison for his participation in the nationalist struggle. He had spent his days in the prison along with prominent leaders like Rajaji, T. Prakasam and Satyamoorthy. He was moved by the information coming out from prisons about the harsh treatment meted out to the
arrested men of the anti-Hindi league agitation. He wrote his indignation and
disappointment to the media condemning the harsh treatment of the detained prisoners of
anti-Hindi agitation. He compared the treatment provided to the Congress leaders in jail
with the treatment provided by the Congress government to the anti-Hindi agitators and
in a lugubrious conclusion pointed out that the shortcomings of Congress government's
treatment of detained agitators of the anti-Hindi stir. He appealed to Rajaji the premier to
rectify his adamant convictions so that the most unpopular anti-Hindi programme would
be given up and peoples especially Non-Brahmins faith in Congress could be restored.134

PonnuSwamy Revolt

A Non-Brahmin Congressman PonnuSwamy of Palladam in the western district of
Coimbatore decided to go on an indefinite fast to force the recalcitrant Premier to heed
the voices of the mounting agitation. He pledged not to break the fast unless a final
rollback of compulsory Hindi programme was achieved. He sat down in front of the
Premier's house with the flag of the boycott committee of Tamilian Association.135 To
emphasize the Gandhian character of the agitation and to reinforce the moral legitimacy
of the struggle the fasting Non-Brahmin Congressman chose to be attired in Khaddar
Kurta and dhoti.

He was arrested along with other agitators and was charged for actively
participating in the anti-Hindi agitation. While others were left on bail, he was detained
further as he had refused to provide any undertaking to the Police authorities to refrain
from continuing the agitation.136 While in jail he launched again into a fast a la Jatin Das
protesting the inhuman and cruel treatment meted out to the agitators. The situation
became more serious as the Police authorities decided to forcefully feed him and his
determination to resist such force-feeding invited admiration from the people. Ultimately
the government authorities gave assurances regarding the treatment of detailed prisoners
he decided to end his fast.
Social Classes, Region and Congress

The social structure of Tamil areas provided the congenial atmosphere for the emergence of the regional movement. The rather unique political phenomenon of an ascendant and assertive regionalism in Tamil areas, unparalleled elsewhere in the country then emanated from this social uniqueness. Though, like elsewhere in India, Tamil areas were profoundly embroiled in the contentious web of caste system, the situation here was different. The intermediary castes and varnas bridging the gap between the numerically smaller Brahmins at the top and the heterogeneous phalanx of sudra communities at the bottom were conspicuous by their absence. The Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were absent in Tamil areas despite the claims by some newly assertive caste groups to Kshatriyas status. Their absence precipitated an unusual situation whereby the demographically minuscule Brahmins enjoyed preponderance of power, position and prestige in religious, social, political and economic spheres. Such preponderance led to the social, cultural and political exclusion of Brahmins from the rest of the masses. Their absence also led to a situation whereby no Non-Brahmin communities were present to dilute the opposition of the newly emerging caste groups against Brahmin dominance.

Furthermore, because of linguistic, social and religious factors no caste in Tamil areas other than Brahmins was in a position to develop political linkages with other groups nationally found outside the State. The Non-Brahmin communities, because of linguistic constraints and restricted, geographical spread could develop only regional organization having largely no contact with national elites and groups. The Brahmins could develop nationally spread political and organizational linkages as they enjoyed the advantages in spiritual, linguistic (Sanskritic) and psychological realms. The Brahmins came to represent the national elite, interests and ideology in the local politics and the non Brahmin communities assumed the regionalist postures in interest articulation, organizational networks etc. They began to advocate issues, concerns and strategies that were essentially regional in origin, spread and orientation against Brahmins with national reach.
The newly educated and increasingly ambitious regional communities initially formed organizations antagonistic to Congress as Brahmins dominated it. They formed in 1916 the Justice Party to work for their welfare and against Brahmins and Congress. But as they achieved confidence, growth and development they found the anti-Congress political platform a constrained one and decided to break out of anti-Congress mould. From 30's onwards they began to join in large numbers the Congress Party where they would now secure their societal interests and remain, in the process part and parcel of the national liberation movement.

The Congress strategies and struggles also drew them into its fold. The Congress growth and the opportunities it offered operated as a pulling factor drawing Non-Brahmin communities and the confidence and newly attained capability of Non-Brahmin communities operated as the push factor, pushing them away from the Justice Party that had outlived its utility into Congress with greater prosperity.137

**Nadars and Congress**

The Nadars living in the extreme south around Tirunelveli supported the Congress Party from the beginning of the twentieth century. Here they were in an antagonistic relationship with the locally dominant Vellalars. The Vellalars possessed economic wealth and high socio-religious status and the Nadars were subordinated to them in social and ritual hierarchy. The Vellalars organized themselves under the banner of the Justice Party to challenge Brahmin supremacy and became successful by winning the elections conducted as a result of 1919 Government of India Act. To oppose their traditional rivals Nadars began to support the opposition party of Congress. Hardgrave succinctly remarked 'the Nadars presented a common congress face to the Justice Vellalars'.138

There were two more regions of Nadar concentration in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu namely Virudhunagar and Sivakasi. Due to economic rivalry historically from the nineteenth century these two groups of Nadars shared a relationship of mutual distrust. The Justice Party was powerful in the Virudhunagar area as the local dominant
leader of Nadars W.P.A. Soundarapandian spearheaded the anti-Brahmin movement there. Unlike the Nadars of Tirunelveli, the Nadars of Virudhunagar could identify their interests with Justice Party in Virudhunagar as they were dominant in numbers and wealth and the oppressive Vellalars were absent. As the Virudhu Nagar Nadars supported Justice Party, the Sivakasi Nadar, their economic rivals naturally gravitated to the opposite Congress Party.

Of the three regions of Nadar concentration only Virudhunagar supported the Justice Party. As stated earlier the Nadar leader of the area W.P.A. Soundarapandian, described as 'the uncrowned King of the Nadar community' was primarily responsible in channalising the energies of Nadars in the direction of the Justice Party. But soon the internal contradictions between wealthy and poor Nadar in this town surfaced. The poor Nadars living in the western part of the town though participated in the Justice movement under the leadership of W.P.A. Soundarapandian, their participation was rather reluctant. As the son of the soil Kamaraj gradually raised in Congress politics this area also became sympathetic to Congress. In 1937 elections Kamaraj contested the Legislative Council elections in the Sattur constituency and became victorious thereby consolidating the Nadar support to the Congress.\textsuperscript{139}

As a result of the 1937 elections the victorious Congress Party formed the government and under the leadership of Rajaji introduced two major pieces of Legislation as part of Congress reconstruction programme, namely the Removal of Civil Disabilities Act (Madras Act XI of 1938) and the Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act (Madras Act XII of 1939). Through these acts the Nadars were empowered to enter the famous Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. As the Nadars through their caste association Nadar Mahajana Sangam had always agitated to gain entry rights into temples, these legislations consolidated their support to Congress Party. "The temple entry legislation of 1937 brought the Congress into increasing Nadar favour; the image of Gandhi and the momentum of the movement for Swaraj brought growing number of Nadars into the Congress fold.\textsuperscript{140}
Maravars and Congress

Maravars formed an important caste group in the southern parts of the Tamil areas. They along with Kallars and Agamudaiars form the heterogeneous cluster called Mukkulathors. This group dominates the demography, society, economy and culture of Madurai and adjacent districts. Thurston in his book 'Castes and Tribes of South India' described the Maravar as "member of a caste which is numerous and influential, as a man of superior physique and bold, independent spirit, thief and robber, village policeman and detective combined is an immense power in the land".\textsuperscript{141}

The Maravars became assimilated into the Congress tradition in 1930's because of their strained relationship with the Justice Party and British government and the initiatives of their leader Muthuramalinga Thever. The British government considered the Maravars as essentially thieves. A police officer named F. Fawcett in the last decade of 19\textsuperscript{th} century had analyzed the crime situation in Tirunelveli District and concluded that the Maravars though formed only 10\% of the population in the district had committed nearly 70\% of the crimes recorded there. The colonial government in 1911 brought in the draconian Criminal Tribes Act to control them. According to this law every registered member of Maravar community had to notify his place of residence to the police authorities. If these persons were to be absent or to change their residence they should intimate the police authorities.

The Justice Party, which came to power in the diarchy system introduced by the Montford reforms, applied the stringent provisions of this law against Maravars in its attempt to maintain law and order in the rural areas. The affected Maravars began to adopt an antagonistic attitude towards the British government and the Justice Party. Muthuramalinga Thevar channalised this animosity of Maravars against the Justice Party in favour of the Congress Party.\textsuperscript{142} He was a relative of the ruling families of Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga and became an ardent supporter of Indian National Congress subsequent to the 1927-inspiring meeting he had with one of the important Congress leaders in the province S.Srinivasa Iyyengar. He attended the Congress session
at Madras in 1927 as a representative of the people of Appanadu. His village called Pasumpon was incorporated into the Congress organization.

In the 1936 District Board elections he campaigned actively for the Congress Party. He came to be elected to the District Board in Ramanathapuram. He also began to form a grand alliance with Kamaraj that facilitated the Non-Brahmin ascendency in the provincial leadership domain of the Congress Party. In the district board elections from Virudhunagar, Kamaraj was put up as a candidate and Thevar bought property in that town in the name of Kamaraj so that the later could become eligible to contest the elections. With characteristic fervour Thevar worked for the Congress organization in his areas and the provincial Congress stalwart Satyamoorthy called him as “Congress Khathan” meaning the protector of Congress. The extremist leader Savarkar also called him as "Southern Tilak". Under his guidance and leadership most of the Maravars shifted their loyalty from Justice Party to the Congress movement in 1930s and in the process they even gave up their traditional allegiance to the pro-Justice Raja of Ramanathapuram.143

Kongu Vellala Gounders and Congress

Kongu Vellala Gounder is an important dominant Non-Brahmin caste group found in the western part of the state called as Kongu Nadu. They own huge chunks of landed wealth in the districts of Coimbatore, Erode, Salem and Karur. They live in predominantly not so fertile areas and demographically there is the conspicuous absence of Brahmin preponderance in these regions inhabited by them. They form the regionally dominant caste community and as they did not face noticeable discrimination from Brahmins they had no incentives to join the anti-Brahmin movement. On the contrary the Non-Cooperation Movement of Gandhiji attracted them. Anti liquor agitation was carried out by INC as part off its non-cooperation in early 1920’s and the Kongu Vellalar community was mobilized on a large scale. The influential leaders of this community wanted to achieve a higher social and political position in the Presidency and hence they conducted the anti-liquor agitation with more vigour.144 The non-cooperation movement
led to the consolidation of the demographically populous Kongu Vellalar Gounders behind Congress.

Depressed Classes and Congress

The depressed classes constituted around 20% of the total population of Tamil speaking areas. There are many communities found within the collective name of scheduled castes, each possessing its own specific identity and endogamous practices. There are three dominant communities among the under privileged groups. Among them the Parayars otherwise called as Adi dravidas live in the central and northern parts while the Pallars now called as Devendrakula Vellalars after the Sanskritisation process live in the southern and central areas and the Telugu speaking Chakkiliyars are found in the western parts of Tamil areas. Though these communities are characterized by separate caste status, endogamy, traditional settlement patterns and themselves practice some aspects of purity versus pollution rituals of the Hindu society they are collectively now known as Dalits as they have been strongly influenced by political mobilizational strategies.

As western education, culture, ideology and administrative structure penetrated these segments of the Indian society they came to realize the deplorable status accorded to them in the traditional Hindu structure and following the protest movement of Non-Brahmin caste Hindus they too began to form their own organizations. For example the Parayar Mahajana Sabha as early as 1890 demanded certain welfare measures from the British government. The formation of the Justice Party in 1916 and the conscious efforts of some of the leaders like T.M. Nair a close relationship was sought to be established between the caste Hindus and dalits. T.M. Nair organized a conference of the depressed classes at Spur Tank in 1917 itself and advocated joint movement by Non-Brahmins and Panchamas against Brahmins.

The tenuous relationship between Justice Party and dalits disintegrated as a result of a series of events called Pulianthope incidents. In 1921 textile mill workers belonging to both caste Hindus and dalits participated in a strike in some of the mills in Madras city.
But as due to economic deprivation the dalits could not involve in the protracted struggle, they returned to work a few days latter. The caste Hindus with resolute opposition to Government continued the strike. Soon violence erupted and in the ensuing chaos the police machinery killed a number of caste Hindus.

The affected workers of Non-Brahmin communities began to show animosity towards not only the government but also dalits for their turn around. They also accused the British government of unduly pampering the dalits. This episode rekindled the age-old fear of the dalits about the Non-Brahmins. M.C. Raja the principal representative of the untouchables in the Legislative Council criticized the Justice Party and said "I am astonished ... at a section of the party which claims to stand for the deprived and the oppressed classes countenancing the persecution and the reign of terror to which my community is at present subjected". He also threatened that if the caste Hindus and Justice Party persisted in their opposition to the oppressed classes, "the untouchable would be obliged to sever their connection with the Justice Party". 147

While addressing the second South India Adi Dravida Congress in Kovilpatty in the southern districts, he again criticized the Justice Party calling its attitudes as "poisonous". In 1923 a deputation of dalits led by M.C. Raja presented a memorandum to the Governor Lord Wellington complaining "the Justice Party had not done justice to the depressed classes in this matter of the nomination of members to the Legislature and the local boards and appointments to the government services". 148 They specifically pointed out that the Non-Brahmin movement had not led to the induction of any member of the depressed classes in the central legislature or provincial ministry. 149 Hence M.C. Raja along with a number of dalits leaders decided to end this fragile coalition and walked out of Justice Party. Thus, though the Justice Party initially performed a unifying role bringing the untouchable under its umbrella of Non-Brahmin communities but later on the irresolvable contradictions between Non-Brahmin and dalits came to assert itself. Moreover the arrival of the Justice Party in the echelons of power in the province through electoral politics diminished its initial idealism and injected narrow conservatism into its outlook. "Very soon after taking office the Justice Party severed its connections with the
untouchable groups. Once in power it became almost entirely a caste Hindu party with little interests in social reform. 150

As part of the constitutional advancement the British Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald announced in 1932 the Communal Award. This award sought to recognize the depressed classes as a separate community for the purpose of conferring separate electorate status. Mahatma Gandhi protested against these constitutional proposals on the ground that this move would perpetually separate the depress classes from the main stream of general Hindu society. The implacable opposition of Gandhiji ultimately led to the signing of the Poona pact whereby the leaders of the depressed classes like Ambedkar agreed to reject the separate electorate status in favour of the strategy of reserving some seats for them within the parameters of a joint Hindu electorate.

Realizing that eradication of untouchability is the prime requisite for the reconstruction of Hindu society and India Gandhiji concentrated his attention on the upliftment of depressed classes whom he named as "Sons of God". Inspired by Gandhiji the INC formed many organizations the most conspicuous of them being the Harijan Seva Sangh. The Brahmin Congressman T.S.S. Rajan was chosen to lead the Tamil Nadu Teendumai Ozhippu Sangam or the Tamil Nadu society for the eradication of untouchability. Bhaktavatchalam, a Non-Brahmin Congressman was chosen as the Vice President of this society for the eradication of untouchability.

The local government bodies like Municipal Councils and District bodies where Congress had crucial influence and powers were utilized by Congressmen to address the problem of untouchability. 151 For example in Salem city the Municipal council passed a resolution that prohibited the issuance of the municipal license to any coffee shop, which excluded the untouchable. In Coimbatore District Board, the Non-Brahmin Congressman V.C. Vellingiri Gounder being the Chairman allocated funds for providing free education to the depressed classes in District Boards schools. In Tirupur the center of the Tamil Nadu branch of All India Spinner's Association anti-untouchability was led by C.A.
Ayyamuthu. In Madurai the Brahmin Congressman A. Vaidhyanatha Iyer in his professional rivalry with N. Natesa Iyer actively undertook anti-untouchability work.

Apart from these formal activities in the local bodies several Congressmen informally carried out anti-untouchability activities. Though several motives for this anti-untouchability work could be adduced like adherence to Gandhian ideology, political career advancement etc. their activities introduced Congress organization among the depressed classes. The Congress leaders like Rajaji as part of the anti-untouchability work supported the temple entry rights for the depressed classes. These Congress leaders wanted to develop the depressed classes by providing them temple entry rights so that their permanent separation from Hinduism would be prevented.

This anti-untouchability campaign of Congress brought forth the support of the Harijans to the Congress Party, as they were already disappointed with the Justice Party. As a result of the Poona pact the scheduled castes were given sixteen reserved seats in Tamil Nadu under the new constitution. Many prospective candidates belonging to these communities either joined the Congress Party formally or made secret agreements to declare themselves in favour of the Congress after the elections. The Congress Party came to power in 1937 as a result of the implementation of 1935 Government of India. It gave positions of significance to the representatives of the Scheduled Castes. V.I. Munusamy Pillai was inducted into the Congress ministry as the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. He was chosen as a minister in recognition of his services in popularizing Congress among the depressed classes.152

Regionalization of Political Discourse

The deep penetration of nationalist values provided the congenial backdrop for the modernization of Tamil language and the resultant Tamilization of political mobilization strategies in the province. In the initial years of the twentieth century it was believed that though Tamil language had a rich literary tradition it “lacked much of the vocabulary that it needed for politics”.153
The national movement began to concentrate on the development of the Tamil language to achieve its ardently advocated objective of the vernacularization of Tamil politics. The Tamil congressmen initiated the process of utilizing Tamil language as a medium of political communication. In this great endeavor both Brahmins and Non-Brahmins participated. The Swadeshi movement was the first conspicuous attempt of congressmen in this endeavor as many political meetings came to be conducted in Tamil.

The Home Rule Movement gave a further fillip to this Tamilization phenomenon as pamphlets, conferences and meetings were usually conducted in Tamil. In 1917 speaking at a conference of the Tanjore District Congress Committee, the chairman V.P. Madhava Rao, a Brahmin hailing from a local Maharastrian family eulogized the organizers for conducting the meeting in Tamil. He said that those who spoke in Tamil have by their speeches demonstrated the capacity of the Tamil language for the expression of ideas connected with administration, law and politics.

In 1919 in a congress meeting Somasundara Bharati after strenuous efforts succeeded in passing a resolution that advocated the replacement of English with Tamil as the medium of political deliberations. In 1921 when all the southern languages had their own separate organizational units, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee too accepted that all proceedings were to be carried out in the local language.

**Bharathiar**

One of the most distinguished Congressmen who contributed to the development of Tamil language was Subramania Bharathi, affectionately known as Bharathiar. Born to Brahmin parents in the southern district of Tirunelveli Bharathiar entered the nationalist struggle through the journalistic route. Initially associated with the nationalist Swadeshamitran as assistant editor he later on started his own weekly called *India* and a Tamil daily called *Vijaya*. He attended Congress sessions in 1906 and 1907. As he was hounded by the British authorities over his nationalist writings he escaped to the French
enclave of Pondicherry and while staying there from 1908 to 1918 he established contacts with extremist Congressmen like Arabindo Gosh and V.V.S. Iyoy.

His contribution to the nationalist movement in the Tamil areas was so immense that M.P. Sivagnanam, who later was to be one of the leaders instrumental in the Tamiliasation of Congress without impinging or infringing on nationalist credentials described the Bharathi era as the southern counterpart to the Tilak era of the north. Bharathiar looked at Tamil with huge pride and esteem and said that it had a living philosophical and poetical literature that was far grander than that of the European languages including English. To clearly establish the greatness of Tamil and to assert their self-esteem in the face of relentless derision from the snobbish Englishmen Bharathi emphatically stated that no European language could boast of a literary work like Thirukkural or Silappathikaram or Ramayanan.

Bharathiar possessed a firm conviction that nationalist efforts towards awakening political consciousness could be achieved through the medium of the adorable Tamil. Bharathiar translated the Bengali song written by Bunkim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel Anandmath into Tamil, which was used extensively in an emotional tone by Congressmen in Madras Presidency. Not satisfied with his first attempt at the translation of the song, Bharathiar again retranslated it extolling the people to worship the nation.

He not only attempted to protect and promote Tamil in political domain but also in religious areas, which was rather significant as he was a Brahmin. His extreme adulation and devotion to the greatness of Tamil language did not prevent him from accepting the rather deplorable contemporary reality of Tamil language. He in his letter to his friend S. Nellaiyappar argued that Tamils should consider the development of Tamil as their cardinal responsibility and to achieve this objective all Tamil scholars should accept new currents of ideas and thoughts. He, often described as the nationalist poet was truly the first one to sow and cultivate the seed of renaissance in Tamil literature.
He strongly believed that Tamil had the same historical status as Sanskrit and Tamil could well be the vehicle of modern thoughts and hence it must be the medium of governance and education. Though a Brahmin by birth he highlighted all the contentious questions, which the Non-Brahmin movement in its regional assertion had highlighted. He strongly criticized the obdurate and obsolete brahmanical beliefs and practices. He told the Brahmins that as India was really awakening to a new age, it would be well for them to voluntarily relinquish all their old pretensions together with the silly and anti-national customs based on such pretensions. He exhorted them to lead the way for the establishment of liberty, equality and fraternity among the people.

Bharathi expressed his passionate commitment towards social change and renaissance. He paid special attention to the liberation of the low castes and untouchables from the age-long oppressions of the privileged. He characterized political freedom as synonymous and synchronous with social equality and economic justice. He represented all the important objectives of the Non-Brahmin movement, which was on ascendancy drive in the politics of the State then. Growth of Tamil language, use of Tamil for political awakening, abolition of caste order, promotion of gender equality, elimination on untouchability all were passionately advocated by him.

**T.V. Kalyanasundaranar**

He was a Non-Brahmin Congressman who contributed a great deal to the Tamilisation of Provincial Politics. He was associated with the journalistic organs like Desabhaktan and Navasakti and immensely utilized these journals to Tamilise politics. He considered the love for Tamil language as the bedrock of Nationalism. He often stated that India was not ruled by English people but by English language. He deplored the linguistic slavery of India to English language and considered it as for more dangerous than the political slavery of India.

The present state of Tamil language and people saddened him and the subjection of the nation to the alien rule was adduced at the paramount reason for this sorry state. For him, only a liberated nation could provide conditions congenial to the flourishing of
Tamil and only through Tamil language national liberation could be achieved. He, after comparing the present nationalists of Tamil areas with the nationalist of other parts like Tilak of Maharashtra came to the sad conclusion that the nationalists here betrayed an inexplicable and undesirable proclivity towards English, often to the detriment of Tamil and exhorted, rather beseeched them to jettison their snobbish attitudes for the sake of national regeneration and linguistic renaissance.

He argued that all political activities of Tamil Nadu Congress committee should be carried out only in Tamil and if was not done, he implored the Congress workers to resort to coercive, compulsive measures so that the cardinal principle of political speeches in Tamil is recognized. He was firmly against the then prevalent practice of printing invitations for public functions in English and Hindi. For example when a public function concerning the inauguration of a Hindi educational institution had the invitation printed only in Hindi and English he attacked the organizers and persuaded them to print the invitation in Tamil. He believed that establishment of a Tamil University should be pursued by all concerned so that conducive atmosphere for the growth of Tamil could be created.

He also vigorously campaigned for the establishment of traditional Gurukulam type educational institutions so that education through mother tongue could be effectively taught. He advocated the formation of two Tamil institutions whereby in one institution Tamil language would be taught and in the other the modern sciences would be taught in Tamil. He also introduced many innovations in journalism favouring Tamil language when he was associated with journals like Navasakthi. He strove strenuously to introduce pure Tamil words replacing the existing alien terms.

The rival regional movement and leaders like Periyar and C.N.Annadurai appreciated his contribution to the Tamilisation of politics in the State. For example C.N. Annadurai eulogized his contribution "he was the first leader to demonstrate that Tamil could be used as a language of political speech and movement. He showed that Tamil possessed all the attributes of a capable language in which modern politics could
be conducted.”rö Annadurai opined that V. Kalyanasundaranar richly deserved the Tamil sobriquet Tamil Thendral or breeze of Tamil.

Periyar, a friend and political adversary of Kalyanasundaranar too eulogized him. He said that Kalyanasundaranar was one of the excellent political speakers in those days. The people would be attracted to Congress meetings only because of the eloquent Tamil of Kalyanasundaranar. Political consciousness among the people was awakened and strengthened largely because of his eloquent and effective speech.

Ramalingam Pillai

Ramalingam Pillai, born in Namakkal in a Non-Brahmin family and like his predecessor Bharati understood the greatness of Tamil language and its relevance to raise political consciousness. He was admired by his followers as Gandhian poet as he possessed consummate skills combined Gandhian values of nationalism and love for Tamil language.

This congressman of Non-Brahmin origin proudly exhibited his affection and enthusiasm for Tamil language and literature. For him nationalism and regionalism were not contradictory concepts but complementary ones. He gloriously described the greatness of Tamil language in many poems and in one poem he said,

Proclaim you are a Tamil
And hold your head high.

This stanza came to be extensively used in Tamil Nadu later as almost all the panchayats and townships have installed notice boards at the entrance of their territory welcoming visitors with these stanza.

Therefore, there were three waves of political action emanating from the region of Madras against the Center in 19th and 20th centuries. While the first two revolts were
against the colonial centre the last one was against the national elite that controlled the anti-colonial movement. The regional communities and forces were not able to find accommodation in the congress organization commensurate with their numerical strength and therefore they revolted to establish regional opposition parties and associations. But from 1930s onwards because of their enhanced strategies, capabilities and confidence gained primarily through the policies of regional parties, the regional communities began to join the national movement. Consequently there was a gradual non-brahmanization and regionalization of congress social base in the province that prepared the ground for the establishment of congress dominance in the post-independence politics of the state.
NOTES

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