CHAPTER- II

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF TAMIL NADU

2.1 Introduction

The Madras Presidency in the second decade of this century witnessed the emergence of two political Movement’s viz., the Home Rule Movement and the Non-Brahmin Movement. The former brought ‘the most benighted’ Presidency of Madras to the forefront of National politics when Dr. Annaie Besant, an Irish theosophist, launched her red-hot agitation for self-Government from Adyar, a suburb of the metropolitan city of Chennai while the latter engineered a ‘revolt of the masses’ against ‘the tyranny of caste’. Consequently, a conspicuous transformation was seen among the people of the ‘so called’ lower varna of South India. Their traditional meekness slowly disappeared. They were aroused from a calm pitiable sullenness by ‘the emerging elite’ – Dr. T.M. Nair, P. Theagaraya Chetti and Dr. C. Natesan and others – of the non-Brahmin communities who were politically articulate, socially viable and economically sound. Indeed they championed the cause of the teeming millions, and therefore for the first time ‘the drawers of water and the heavers of wood’ asserted themselves against the intellectual oligarchy of the upper caste people namely the Brahmins who were considered ‘the Magyars of Madras Presidency’. In this chapter an attempt has been made to elucidate the data relating to social and political history of Tamil Nadu during the colonial rule for proper understanding of the study.
2.2 Home Rule Movement in Tamil Nadu

The Home Rule Movement, an auxiliary of Indian National Congress started by Annie Besant, in 1916, was a flash which blazed the firmament of Indian politics. This Movement which lasted for a short span of time synchronised internationally with the First World War and internally with a similar Movement that sparing up from the brains of B.G. Tilak. It captured the imagination of the Indian masses by articulating the twin principles of self-Government of self-determination. “These magic words, ‘Home Rule’ spelled patriotism and hope to nationalist India, sedition and anarchy to British administrators in India”.

Dr. Besant, the high priestess of this Movement, was a courageous and undaunted social worker and an orator of unrivalled power. She came to India as a messiah to emancipate the tens of thousands of men and women who languished under British imperialism and to render them service in a spirit of true humanity inasmuch as the adopted India both as her homeland and holy land. “Our philosophy and poetry, our history and legends, our spiritual and cultural heritage, our sorrows and sufferings, our hopes and aspirations were part and parcel of Mrs. Besant’s own life”.

She occupied the political scene of India during the interregnum which set in after the demise of G.K. Gokhale in 1915 and before Gandhiji launched his Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920. As a mature political and social worker, she gave a new dimension to Indian politics by bringing into it the idea of propaganda and publicity. It was only by her that the agitation style of politics was first introduced in India. In her own words, she was ‘an Indian tom-tom, waking up all the sleepers so that they may wake and work for their motherland’. Though she emerged as an all-
India figure, she was of particular importance to South India, especially to Madras Presidency. Nevertheless, she was not a substitute in a political vacuum.

2.2.1 Dr. Besant in Indian Politics

Beasent’s interest in India was first aroused as early as 1879. It was long before her arrival in India and even before the birth of the Indian National Congress. She had used her mighty pen for a wholesale condemnation of British Raj in the soil of Indian people. In a volume entitled, England, India and Afghanistan she wrote as follows: “We exploited Hindustan not for her benefit but for the benefit of our younger sons, our restless adventurers, our younger sons, our restless adventurers, and our quarrelsome and never-do-well surplus population. At least for the sake of common honesty let us drop our hypocritical mask and acknowledge that we seized India from lust of conquest, from greed of gain, from the lowest and paltriest of desires”.

Dr. Besant, even considered the ‘Great Rebellion’ of 1857 as the ‘natural nemesis’ treading on the heels of the crimes of Clive, Warren Hastings, Cornwallis, Wellesley and Dalhousie. In 1893, when she came to India she witnessed a degraded and degenerated nation which she attributed to the loss of faith among the Hindus in their own religion. She kept aloof from politics in the ordinary sense of the term for nearly two decades. She established the Central Hindu College in Benares with a view to reviving the Hindu faith and promoting Indian nationalism. During that period she published a number of books to popularise the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads.

To Dr. Besant, Ireland was a pleasant land of dead souls; perhaps it was due to this fact that three quarters of her blood and all her heart were Irish. In her
autobiography she wrote; “The Irish tongue is musical to my ear”. Naturally the Irish
Home Rule League would have provided the time for her political ideology. Her
multifarious experiences in the early years of her life, professing Christianity,
Atheism, Fabian Socialism and finally Theosophy gave her enough courage to brave
the stormy weather of politics. Dr. Besant unhesitatingly plunged into the battle of
freedom Movement when the nationalists eagerly looked forward to new leadership.
Despite her kaleidoscopic career her loyalty to truth was steadfast. In 1913, Dr.
Besant gave a series of eight lectures in Chennai, which constituted the first step
towards full scale involvement in Indian politics. In fact; these lectures brought
Mrs. Besant out of her theosophical shell and signalled a new militancy”. To fight a
battle for Home Rule, she started an English weekly, Commonwealth in January
1914. Afterwards, she purchased the Madras Standard, an English daily and renamed
it New India the first issue of which appeared on 14, July the anniversary of the fall of
Bastille. Presumably, it reveals her leanings towards French radicalism. Her New
India was a great force in the battle for India’s independence. It made appreciable
headway as a powerful vehicle for Besant’s varied ideas and at one time it was
perhaps the most popular paper in South India.

Her continuous writing in its pages commenced and intensive campaign
claiming Home Rule for India began. It is to be borne in mind that the idea of Home
Rule was not the sole gift of Dr. Besant. In fact, it was a new slogan but not a new
doctrine. Earlier to her, leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji stressed the need for Home
Rule in the following lines: “We need Home Rule because we need to be free to work
for India’s uplift, for decent education, for the raising of the sub-merged, for the freest
ruction of the hated s activity of citizens in a self-governed country, for the
destruction of the hated sense of inferiority, for the feeling that we are the owners, not
the tolerated tenants of our motherland. We are hypnotised by the talk of the ‘Pax Britannica’ the blessings of British rule, and all the rest of the jargon dinned into our tired ears”.

2.3 Madras Presidency in the Forefront of Freedom Struggle

Annie Besant was thoroughly dissatisfied with the way in which Congress affairs were being managed by the Moderates. Ever since ‘Surat’, Tilak and the other Extremists had been kept off, the Congress without militant nationalist element was leading an anaemic existence. Her London trip in 1914 was significant in many respects. She was very vigorous in putting forth her plea on behalf of India for Home Rule,. She spoke thus: “India asked only that she shall be recognized as a nation, she be shall be given self-Government, shall be an integral part of the Empire, composed of self-governing communities. She asked no more than this”.

After joining Congress in 1914 Besant put India’s case for self-Government in a way that was both forcible and compatible with the nation’s dignity. She tried to sell the idea of her Home Rule to the Indian National Congress and unite that body by re-admission of the Extremists who has been expelled after the ‘Surat split’. The moderate faction led by Pherozeshah Mehta which controlled the Congress was reluctant to embrace the Extremists. In 1915, when Besant attended the Bomby Congress, which was presided over by S.P. Sinha, she submitted her plan for starting Home Rule League with the object of attaining complete Home Rule for India. She was not afraid to use the phrase Home Rule although it was a bolt from the blue for many people as it recalled the violent Home Rule Movement of Ireland under Parnel.

At a time when the fortune of Congress was at the lowest ebb due to the death of Pherozeshah Mehta and G.K. Gokhale, Dr. Besant started the Home Rule League
at Gokhale Hall in Chennai on the 1st of September 1916. It made swift and spectacular progress captivating young nationalist minds. In April of the same year B.G. Tilak had already started a similar League in Poona. In 1916 Dr. Besant went to Poona with C.P. Ramaswmi Aiyar to plead with Tilak for the unification of her Home Rule League with that of his. As she was repulsed by Tilak she did not succeed in her task. It was an open blessing for Tamil Nadu. Since then Besant acted as a tornado by bringing forth Madras Presidency into the forefront of All-India politics.

Her Home Rule League which was more effective in Madras Presidency than elsewhere spread like a prairie fire. By September 1917, it had nearly 130 branches all over the Presidency. Theosophists who were personally attached to Besant came forward to shoulder the cause of Home Rule League. The agitation clearly carried the banner of self-Government to a much wider range of people than those who actually joined the League – “to villagers and rustics as well as town folk”. The people who were inspired by the slogans of Home Rule published pamphlets, opened libraries and reading rooms which contained materials of this Movement. The press played an important role in its growth. New India had the largest circulation of any other South Indian newspaper by 1916. Tamil savants like Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar famously known as Thiru. Vi. Ka., Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu used the vernacular as the medium to propagate the message of Home Rule. For the first time in Tamil Nadu a large number of non-English speaking people came forward to participate actively in politics. Further, the Provincial Committee of Congress was made use of for propaganda purpose. Her friend C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar and A. Rangaswami Iyengar gave lectures on constitutional topics which attracted a large number of college students.
Her sailing on the high seas of politics in Tamil Nadu, however, was not without its rough weather. She was looked upon even by the nationalists as a newcomer to the Indian political scene since she joined the Congress in 1914. Even her theosophical association made her appear suspicious and ludicrous because the whole atmosphere at Adyar was rather theatrical. G. Narayanaiah’s Court proceedings against Besant who held his son, J. Krishnamurthy as her protégé revealed many Tamilians who looked at her with cynicism for the simple reason that her close associates were the theosophists most of whom were Smartha Brahmis. Besides, she suffered for a serious handicap that she was unaware of any Indian language except for a little of Sanskrit. This seriously limited her understanding of Indian institutions and literature. Her severe criticism of the Swadeshi Movement and her over-bearing attitude in her dealings with other nationalist politicians estranged her from many in the Congress. Right from the beginning, the white population in Madras Presidency was uncharitably antagonistic towards her.

2.4 The Government’s Reaction

The Government’s reaction to this Movement was one of derision, bewilderment and alarm. Nevertheless, her demand for self-Government within the British Empire was extremely modest. She was not a foe of the British. All that she wanted was to awaken the Indians from centuries of slumber and inaction. She ingeniously utilized her international reputation to influence the people abroad in favour of her Movement. Her detractors like Geoffrey Dawson used pejorative language against her, stigmatising her as an ‘obstreperous old harridan’.

However, the Home Rule Movement made rapid headway in South India. Lord Pentland, and unstained imperialist, Govern of Madras. Presidency was
disturbed by the new development. Equally, Besant remained stubborn and unyielding. The New India increased its tempo and sharpness of its attack on the British bureaucracy. In fact, it spoke a language of revolution. The New India press was repeatedly called upon to furnish security under the Press Act of 1910 which had originally been used to squash the terrorist newspapers. Such securities were repeatedly forfeited; she put forth her plea in the High Court both personally and through her advocate Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar and this trial gave her organisation great publicity. As a result, the public quickly rallied to her side. She spoke with the fervour of a prophet. “If the Government are determined to crush the paper and myself because I carry on a perfectly legitimate agitation, they have the power to gain the momentary victory but history will judge them”. Lord Pentland who saw red in the rise of this Movement let loose a series of repressive measures to put down the agitation. He was not satisfied with the forfeiture of the deposit amount of Dr. Besant but went to the extent of extending her from Bombay and then from the Central Province and Bihar.

After the Lucknow Congress where a temporary rapprochement was brought about between the Moderates and the Extremists, Besant made a strong statement in favour of Indian Home Rule in 1916 at the Cuddalore Political Conference. In the middle of June, 1917 Pentland, as a final attempt, with a large heart of persuading her into abandoning the Home Rule campaign, came down to Chennai from Ootacamund. It would be interesting to read what transpired between them. The tone and tenor of Pentland’s talk to Besant was not persuasive but authoritative. It greatly pulled her. She was even threatened with deportation to England. He made it clear that if she did not abandon her Home Rule campaign he would have to put an end to all her activities including those of a non-political character because he could not
discriminate between one form of activity and another. Since there seemed to be no meeting found at all, Besant finally told him: “You have all the power and I am helpless and you must do what you like. There is just one thing I should like to say to Your Excellency, that is, that I believe you are striking the deadliest blow against the British Empire in India”.

2.4.1 Dr. Besant’s Internment

After this historic meeting, punitive measures quickly followed. On 16, June 1917 the trio – Annie Besant, G.S. Arundale and B.P. Wadia, her colleagues – in political and journalistic work were interned under the orders of the Government of Madras. Arundale and Wadia were obliged to live within the city limits of Coimbatore and Besant alone at Ooty in the Nilgris. On the eve of the internment she left behind a parting message expressing her hope and firm belief that India would soon win Home Rule. Immediately “a whirlwind broke out, raged up and down the country, stormed over to Britain, Russia, France, America, at several hundred miles an hour”. Protest meetings were organised at several places in Chennai. The repercussions were shrewdly summed up by Gandhiji who remained out of controversial politics, in a letter to the Viceroy on 10, July 1917: “In my humble opinion the internments are a big blunder. Madras was absolutely calm before then, now it is badly disturbed. India as a whole had not made common cause with Mrs. Besant, but now she is in a fair way towards commanding India’s great sacrifice and love for India or desire to be strictly constitutional”.

During the week following the arrest of Besant, events in Allahabad moved with unwonted rapidity. Pandit Motilal Neharu, Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru, Munshi Narayan Prasad Asthana, C. Y. Chintamani and a number of other joined the Home
Rule League as a protest against the arbitrary action of the Government of Madras, in fact the internment gave a fresh impetus to strengthen the Home Rule Movement not only in India but also abroad.

2.5 Wilson Woodrow and India’s Independence

The political activities of Besant attracted President Wilson who regarded himself as an American Edmund Burke when he launched out into his political career at the commencement of the century. And in the ultimate analysis Wilson’s vision was inspired by the Burkean tradition of “Magnanimity in Politics”, Wilson’s momentous message to United State Congress on 2, April 1917 asking for declaration of war was no less than a Charter of Justice in international relations that upheld the cause of small nations and people fighting for freedom. U.S. President’s address inspired Dr. S. Subramania Iyer, a great Judge and a founder member of the Indian National Congress to write to him seeking American intervention for, India’s freedom at the end of the First World War. His letter which was carried by Hotchner couple to Washington was given the widest publicity. Indeed the letter written on 24, Jun 1917 did much to swing the American public opinion in favour of India’s freedom struggle. The transparent sincerity of this legal luminary gained for him the support of several influential Americans including Rober Lansiving, Col, E.M. House, Henry Morgenthau and Franklin D. Roosevelt. It is worth quoting form Dr. S. Subraminia Iyer’s letter: “It is the very relationship of the Indian Nationalist Movement to the war that urges the necessity for an immediate promise of Home Rule autonomy for India, as it would result in an offer from India of at least five million men in three months for service at the front and of five million more in another three months. India can do this because she has a population of 315 million, three times that of the United States
and almost equal to the combined population of all the Allies. The people of India will
do this because then they would be free men and not slaves. It is our earnest hope that
you may so completely convert England to your ideals of world liberation that
together you will make it possible for India’s millions to lend assistance in this war”.

Not surprisingly, the tremor caused by his letter to President Wilson was felt
in England, for the Secretary of State Edwin Samuel Montagu thundered against the
remarkable Judge in the House of Commons: “The impropriety of this disgraceful
letter is all the more inexcusable owing to the position of the writer. The assertions in
the letter are too wild and baseless to require or receive notice from any responsible
authority. No action has yet been taken regarding the matter and I am communicating
with Viceroy”.

It is true that no official action was taken against the Judge even though there
was a threat to deprive him of his title, K.C.I.E and even his pension. The undaunted
courage of this statesman was indeed matchless. He said: ‘‘Internment or
externment, deportation and the like, have no terror for me and at this time of my life
with no earthly expectations to realise, I feel I can have no more glorious face to meet
in pursuance of gaining Home Rule for India than to become object of official
tyranny’’. Thus the services of Justice Subramania Iyer in the furtherance of the cause
of the Home Rule League were undoubtedly remarkable.

Montagu’s Declaration

A dramatic turn in the policy of the British Government took place when
Austin Chamberlain resigned and his place was taken by Edwin S. Montagu, a
pronounced Liberal with broad sympathies, who issued a proclamation jointly with
the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford in 1917, which revealed the intention of the British to
grant self-Government by gradual development of self-governing institutions. In
pursuance of this policy Montagu and Chelmsford toured the country to formulate a
scheme after gathering public opinion. By then Besant was released as a result of
continuous agitation and growing public indignation. As a spontaneous mark of
recognition of her services, in August 1917 she was made the President of the annual
session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta. The opening speech of her
presidential address reveals her firmness of mind in promoting the cause of the
country’s independence: “While I was humiliated you crowned me with honour;
while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was c
under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was
silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me and won for my release. I
was proud to serve in the lowest fashion, but you lifted e up and placed before the
world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no
eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are
too poor. I turn your gift into service to the motherland; I consecrate my life anew to
her in worship by action. All that I have and am, I lay on the altar of the mother, and
together we shall cry, more by service than by words, Vande Mataram”.

There were scathing criticisms about her presidential talk. Times of India
pointed out that “her remarks were not addresses to the delegates in Calcutta, but to a
large public seven thousand miles away”.

The announcement of Montagu sounded a feeble and half-hearted response to
India’s passionate plea for equality of status. “Unworthy of Britain to offer and of
India to accept” was Besant’s first reaction. The followed numerous conferences and
deputations and two years of negotiations and detailed discussions – all intended to
improve upon and enlarge the scope of the British declaration. She remained a critic
as long as there was the least hope of securing a more liberal scheme from the Lloyd
George’s Cabinet. When the phase of negotiations finally came to an end and the
scheme was ready for introduction, she became a discriminating supported. Accepting
the British scheme at that stage meant for her only an advance towards the ultimate
goal, not its repudiation.

2.5.1 Besant’s Unpopularity

There was a virile attack from her won followers and contemporaries. Her
realism they flagrantly lacked. Her change of attitude seemed to them
incomprehensible. When she attempted to explain her position at a Provincial
Conference at Chennai, called specially to consider the Reforms, she was opposed by
many of those present. The meeting itself as ‘marred by shouting, hatred and
suspicion, directed mostly against her’. The next day (August 5) through her New
India, ‘dazed by the storm’ she asked her fellow Home Rulers. “My Tamil brethren,
what have I done to you that you hate me so bitterly? In the “seventies of the last
century before you were born, I was working for India.. I shall continue to work for
her till Home Rule is won”. It is evident that she had been very much annoyed by the
criticisms of her own followers. She was even prepared to resign. The rapid march of
events brought about a thorough change of Indian political scene and outlook. The
Amritsar tragedy in 1919 and the excess of martial law administration in the Punjab
sent a wave of indignation throughout the nation. Gandhi appeared for the first time
on the political scene as a front rank leader with his Non-co-operation Movement and
the boycott of the legislatures elected under diarchic constitution.

With courage and conviction, Besant decided to oppose Gandhii’s Movement
and his policy of boycott. Her decision was painful and costly. Several of her valued
colleagues preferred to throw the weight of their influence on Gandhiji’s side. At a critical Movement came Tilak’s death, thus completely isolating her from other nationalists in the political field. Her fate as the leader of the Indian Nationalist Movement appeared to have been symbolically sealed.

2.5.2 Her Later Activities

Dr. Besant, undeterred by the indifference and even the personal hostility of a number of her erstwhile supporters, continued to evince interest in the affairs of India. Her idea of self-determination for India was later wrapped in the form of the Commonwealth of India Bill which she tried to get enacted in the House of Commons. It became an abortive attempt. Yet her ideas did not die. The work on the Commonwealth Bill of India was of great help to the Nehru Committee to prepare a report which embodied a commonly acceptable scheme for attaining dominion status. It is deplorable that she did not realise her most cherished dream of securing freedom for India before her death.

2.6 Home Rule Movement and Non-Brahmin Movement

This enchanting personality was thoroughly understood by a group of intellectual non-Brahmins. Her theosophical bias with its emphasis on the great Brahmanical past of India quickly brought her into opposition with non-Brahmin leaders. Dr. Nair, one of the founding fathers of Justice Party Movement hastened the formation of South Indian Liberal Federation at the end of 1916. However, it was one of occasion rather than the cause. A serious social and political conflict arose from the apprehension that the Brahmans under whose spell Besant was, might take over the reins of the Government should she succeed in her Home Rule endeavours. The Non-Brahmin Manifesto issued by P.T Theagaraya Chetti speaks this fact as follows:
“We are not in favour of any measure which, in operation is designed, or tends completely, to undermine the influence and authority of the Brahmin rulers who along in the present circumstances of India are able to hold the scales even between creed and class”. In her view Non-Brahmin Movement was unpatriotic, short-sighted and narrow-minded. As a matter of fact, this aspect of modern South Indian history is to be decided by taking into consideration the various socio-political factors of the 19th century Tamil Nadu. It stands to her credit that the Andhra Movement which predated her political advent was strengthened by her explicit backing of the general demand for education in the regional languages.

2.6.1 An Appraisal

The Home Rule Movement spearheaded by Besant constitutes singularly and illuminating chapter in the annals of South India. It placed before the country a concrete scheme of Self-Government. There is no gainsaying that Montford Reforms which gave the first instalment of constitutional reforms to the Indians were largely due to her agitation. Despite its short life, Dr. Besant’s Movement was exceedingly popular with the masses of Tamil Nadu. “Her League in Madras, as Christopher John Baker puts it, reinvigorated the Congress by projecting a demand for more Indian control over the new leviathan”. In implementing her programmes, she detested the timid policy of the Moderates as well as the violent attitude of the Extremists though at one time she was very eager to associate herself with B.G. Tilak. But by organising meetings and conferences in various cities and towns of Tamil Nadu and by speaking so candidly that, “England’s difficulty was India’s opportunity” Dr.Besant actually took the peace by storm. In fact she gave a new style of political strategy - an agitational style -to the politics of Tamil Nadu. It is significant to mention that her
campaign, by triggering off the Non-Brahmin Movement in this part of the country paved the way for the polarisation of political groups in Chennai. Nevertheless, she failed to take cognizance of the growing strength of non-Brahmin communities which caused a political and social conflict in the Peninsular India. Truly the philosophy of Non-Brahmin Movement was popular with the people of backward classes thereby throwing a challenge to the Brahmín monopoly in the administration of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. It is to be admitted that Dr. Besant spoke a language of derision against the Non-Brahmin Movement characterising it as “mischievous and unpatriotic” without understanding its significance. Moreover, her theosophical leanings, eulogising Hindu mythology prevented her Home Rule Movement from becoming broad-based. In the same way her Movement which was much ideology oriented never blossomed into an intensive organisation with larger operational means. However the unpleasant corollary of her political activities was that the Province of Madras fell into the whirlpool of communal politics.

2.7 The Birth of the Justice Party

The birth of the Justice Party in the second decade of this century constitutes a landmark in the history of South India. The long-smouldering discontent, hatred and suspicion of the elite non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency towards Brahmmins got institutionalised under the nomenclature of the S.I.L.F. whose primary purpose was “to promote the political interests of the non-Brahmin caste Hindus”. By championing their cause it challenged the preponderance of the Brahmmins in all spheres of life, more particularly in the field of education and Government service. Though a political organisation was long-felt need for the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency, it took a concrete shape only in the second decade of the present
century. However, it was neither a sudden outcome nor an accident of history but “a well organised endeavour of a group of elite non-Brahmins who were politically articulate to establish the identity of the non-Brahmin communities” and also organise themselves into a political party.

When Dr. Besant launched a vigorous agitation for Home Rule, a large number of her enthusiastic supporters and key advisers were only Brahmins. This created a genuine apprehension in the minds of non-Brahmin leaders that the Home Rule would eventually lead to the establishment of Brahmin rule. Indeed, the fear of Brahmin takeover of political power, if Besant succeeded in Her Home Rule agitation, compelled the non-Brahmin stalwarts to contemplate in terms of a political organisation for the amelioration of their communities. Thus the Home Rule Movement of Besant, more than anything else, acted as a catalyst which triggered off the birth of the Justice Party. As stated already, it was only the occasion but not the cause. Since the Congress remained as a sectarian body in the hands of the Brahmins, the Justice Party took an anti-Congress posture, which was by mistake viewed by scholars like D. A. Washbrook as anti-national.

It needs to be stressed that the leaders of the Justice Party were “all men of substance and standing, highly educated, and conscious of the direction and goal of their endeavours”. They were not mere idealists, but practical politicians. They accepted diarchy with view to employing the available power of the Government for the upliftment of the non-Brahmin communities. That is the reason why they did not believe much in the uncertain prospect of total transfer of power from a strong foreign Government. “The practical and cautious realism of the Justice Party was naturally misunderstood by Nationalists, as a species of cowardly and selfish betrayal of the country’s cause”. However, it cannot be construed that this Movement was
engineered by the Government of Madras because of its unqualified support to the British Raj and inveterate hostility towards the Congress. Though its area of operation was confined to the Madras Presidency, it enjoyed remarkable support from the masses for over three decades and it functioned effectively through various local branches. What the Muslim League was to the Muslims, the Justice Party was to the non-Brahmins in those days.

The dynamic leadership of Dr. T.M. Nair in its early days enabled the Party to grow rapidly. He carried the banner of non-Brahminis far and wide. The Party convened its first Conference at Coimbatore in August 1917. Thereafter a series of conferences were held in the Tamil and Telugu Districts of the Presidency. The speed with which the non-Brahmin leaders organised the Conferences all over the Presidency, not only speaks volumes of their ability but also the popularity of the non-Brahmin creed. Obtaining communal representation for non-Brahmins in the Legislative Council was one of its main objectives. To achieve this, it became necessary for the leaders of the Justice Party to send a deputation to London to plead before the Joint Select Committee, and it secured a special representation for them within a remarkably short period of time.

Though the policy of the Justice Party appears to be communal to a casual observer, a clear analysis of its ideologies and programmes makes it clear that its demand for communal representation was based on the principles of social justice. Therefore they vehemently opposed “the tyranny of caste” and the superior status of the Brahmins which the Varna system bestowed on them. The Justice Party stood for the specific purpose of overthrowing the Brahmin supremacy in the political and economic spheres and destroying their hegemony in the administrative services. The real intentions of the founders of the Justice Party were to claim its share of “loaves
and fishes of office”. To quote E.F. Irschick “the Justice Party exemplified the manner in which the Backward Classes all over India tried to enhance their position in Provincial affairs”. It is to be admitted that there was tremendous political awakening among the people of the lower strata of the society after its advent. This has given it a pride of place in the history of the Backward Classes Movement.

During the terms of the first two Councils under the diarchical constitution, the Justice Party remained in power by commanding a comfortable majority. It also earned the credit for having successfully experimented diarchy in Madras Presidency. It cannot be denied that only during the regime of the Justice Party, an effective opposition emerged in the Legislative Council of Madras Presidency for the first time in its long history.

The legislative performance of the members of the Justice Party was really noteworthy. “The social legislation which they undertook and carried through the Councils was welcomed by the public and their activities in educational and industrial fields were on the whole considered beneficial and in the interests of the people”. The Hindu Religious Endowments Act which stands even today as a testimony to the Justice Party’’s secular stance may rightly be regarded as one of the remarkable pieces of social and religious reform ever attempted by the Party. It cut at the roots of an organised system of corruption and misuse of the funds of the Hindu temples. This Act placed the accumulated wealth of the temples and even the mutts under Government control. The two Communal Government Orders which were passed at the instance of the Justice Party constitute a milestone in its social policy which could not be politically reversed and this has been amply demonstrated when the principles of reservation of seats for the educationally and economically Backward Classes were accepted not only in Tamil Nadu but also in other parts of the country.
There was a general criticism that the leaders of the Justice Party did not have any real influence over the formulation of policy with regard to the subjects of the “Reserved half”. It was suspected that their Ministry succumbed to the influence of the Executive Council and adopted a lukewarm attitude in championing the public interests against its encroachment. This criticism is untenable if the policy of the Justice Party is viewed from the standpoint of “responsive co-operation” with the “Reserved half” which the Party professed from its inception. The Justice Party’s enthusiasm to work on the diarchy vanished as soon as the reforms proved to be a heavy strain on it. The members of the party did not realise the climax of diarchical absurdity until they confronted a position of “powerlessness”. It is obvious that the Ministers were clothed with responsibility without authority. Yet the comparative freedom that they enjoyed helped them build up a parliamentary tradition. Thus the diarchical constitution which Montford Reforms implemented gave sufficient political training to the Indians to march along the path of self-Government which the Government of India Act of 1935 envisaged. Since the Justice Party gave the heterogeneous group of non-Brahmin communities a certain amount of coherence and unity as well as identity non-Brahminism became a popular creed of the people and an attractive vocabulary in the political dictionary of Tamil Nadu. In fact, it had become a part of its social history of the Tamils. It is true that this Party introduced “caste idiom” into the politics of South India and transformed the style of political leadership. The non-Brahminisation of Congress Party in the thirties of this century was an inevitable consequence of this political development. It should also be said to the credit of the Justice Party that it succeeded in dislodging the Brahmins from their privileged positions in South India. However, the debacle of the Justice Party in the
1937 elections gave a chance for the revival of the Congress Party in Madras Presidency.

Before we attempt to trace the history of the Congress Party in Tamil Nadu which came to power in 1937 and managed to be in the gaddi for over thirty years, it is appropriate here to give an account of how the diarchical constitution was put into operation in Madras Presidency from 1920 to 1937.

2.8 The Montford Reforms of 1919

The introduction of Montford Reforms in 1919 was a far-reaching legislative measure which changed the complexion and the character of the legislative councils of the provinces. It was a corollary of the political activity that India witnessed in the wake of the First World War. The Government of the United Kingdom had been forced to change its policy towards India, when there was a tremendous political awakening among the people of India. Besides the agitation launched by the educated men of middle class and the great sacrifices made by the people in the global war were not in small degree responsible for the changed policy of the British administrators. Hence, the historic announcement of Edwin Samuel Montagu, the Secretary of State for India on 20, August 1917 in the House of Commons is an important land mark in the history of India. It was made clear that the policy of the British Government was “to associate Indians in every branch of administration and to develop self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India”. To achieve this goal, the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme was worked out and was embodied in the Act of 1919 which offered a new Constitution for India.
2.9 Its Salient Features

This Constitution had made no change in the theory of parliamentary sovereignty over India and the powers of the Secretary of State over the Government at Delhi were allowed to remain unaltered. Nonetheless there was a perceptible change in the relative positions of White Hall and Red Fort. The primary purpose of this Constitution was that the Government of India must take the opinion of the Legislature and carry out its wishes. Therefore it created in the place of the Viceroy’s Legislative Councils, a two chambered Legislature, the Legislative Assembly and the Council of States. But this principle of bicameralism was not extended to the Provinces.

The reformed Constitution, however, brought forth certain radical changes in the relationship between the Central Government and those of the Provinces. It removed in fact some of the restraints imposed on the Province by the Governor-General-in-Council. To curb the power wings of the Central Government the Montford Reforms divided the subjects into Central and Provincial and to introduce responsible Government in the Provinces it created, diarchy which meant separation of functions at provincial level. In other words Provincial Government was divided into two compartments: Reserved and Transferred. The Reserved subjects included Finance, Law, Revenue, Law and Order, Forests and Commerce. The transferred subjects were Agriculture, Health, Education and Local Self-Government. The Reserved Departments were administrated by the governor with the help of his Council while Transferred Departments were placed under the control of popular Ministers responsible to the Legislature.

The whole purpose of the division of powers was to enforce the principle of ministerial responsibility in the Legislature with regard to the administration of the
Transferred Department. It meant the removal of Ministers by the vote of popular representatives whose confidence the Ministers were supposed to possess. It also implied that the Minister had absolute control over his departments so that he would be able to defend the proposals emanating from them. In fact diarchy was less than half autonomy for the Provinces because more vital subjects were being administered by the Reserved than by the Transferred half. With the introduction of the new Constitution the Provinces acquired a new political consciousness.

The authors of this Constitution were against communal electorate which the non-Brahmin communities of Madras Presidency despite their numerical majority demanded on the ground that the social and sacerdotal authority of the Brahmins gave them an advantage which they made use of for their political ends. However the demand of non-Brahmins became irresistible. Instead of introducing communal representation the reformed Constitution reserved a minimum number of seats for the non-Brahmins on the common electorate which was the special feature of the Legislative Council of Madras Presidency.

2.10 The First General Elections

The first general elections for the new Council to be constituted as per the Reforms of 1919 were held at the end of November 1920. The Congress under the leadership of Gandhi launched a non-violent Non-co-operation Movement and carried on a vigorous propaganda for the boycott of elections. It failed to evoke enthusiasm in any section of the people and in fact it found very little favour in Madras Presidency.

Having decided loyally to accept the Reforms despite its serious handicaps and shortcomings, the Justice Party carried on its election campaign with greater
eagerness and won a tremendous victory. It captured 63 seats out of 98 seats. Among the nominated members it claimed 18 as its supporters. In a chamber of 127 members the Justice Party had strength of 81. “For the first time in the history of India, the lower castes of Madras have asserted themselves against the intellectual oligarchy of the upper, and have seized political power in their own hands… The first bulwark of caste dominance in political matters has been stormed as a result of the recent constitutional changes”. P. Theagaraya Chetty, the accredited leader of the party, took herculean efforts to lead his party to power. The reservation of seats to the non-Brahmin Hindus served as a lever to secure for them a comfortable representation in the local Legislative Council.

2.11 The Formation of the First Ministry

In accordance with the English parliamentary practice and procedure, Lord Willington, the Governor invited P. Theagaraya Chetti, the leader of the majority party, to form the Ministry. But he persuaded one of his colleagues A. Subbarayalu Reddiyar to take up the office. It was only on his advice the Ministers of “Transferred Half” were chosen. A. Subbarayalu Reddiyar, an advocate and a fellow student of P. Theagaraya Chetti at the Presidency College Chennai was appointed the First Minister of the cabinet and was assigned the portfolios of Education, Public Works, Excise and Registration.

P. Ramarayaninagar, a Velama Zamindar of Kalashasti, an M.A in Sanskrit, a product of Presidency College, Chennai, and a former member of the Imperial Legislative Council, was put in charge of Local Self- Government and Public Health. K.V. Reddi Naidu, an advocate and former student of Madras Christian College was made the Minister for Development.
The new Ministry assumed office on 17, December 1920. Subsequent Edwin Periyanayakan, A. Ramaswami Mudaliar and P. Subbaroyan were appointed Council Secretaries with a monthly salary of Rs.500/- and their appointment was announced in the Council on 14, February 1921. Within a short period A. Subbarayalu Reddiyar resigned his Chief Ministership since his health declined. In his place A.P. Patro, a lawyer for Berhampore was inducted. He took over the portfolio of Education. P. Ramarayaningar who was elevated to the office of First Minister retained the portfolio of Local Self-Government.

Though Willington had a Ministry solely made up of non-Brahmins, he chose Brahmins for several other key positions. For instance, he nominated P. Rajagopalachari, a Brahmin, as the President of the Legislative Council which had a non-Brahmin majority. K. Srinivasa Iyengar was made a member of his Executive Council. Khan Bahadur Habibullah Khan, a prominent Muslim, was appointed the second Indian member. In the same way the Governor gave the post of the Advocate-General to C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, a well-known Home Ruler. Leaders of the Justice Party thought that Lord Willington had chosen those Brahmins to such high offices in order to keep the non-Brahmin Ministers at bay.

2.11.1 The Formation of the Second Ministry

The first Legislative Council was dissolved with effect from 11, September 1923 after the expiry of its term. The Ministers resigned their offices. The second general elections to the Madras Legislative Council and the Central Legislative Assembly were held on 31, October 1923. Though the Justice Party was in a position to form the Ministry, its strength had got reduced considerably. Its poor performance in the election was due to various reasons.
1. Internal dissension began to corrode the vitals of the party.

2. The exclusion of the Tamils from the first ministry slackened the enthusiasm of the party workers in the southern districts. The first Justice Party Ministry’ was described as an ‘Andhra Non-Brahmin Hindu Ministry’. The leaders of the Justice Party did not fail to take cognisance of the fact. Within a short while, three non-Telugu E. Periyanayagam, an Indian Christian, A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, and Dr. P. Subbaroyan were appointed the Council Secretaries.

3. The members of the Congress were set at liberty ‘to stand as candidates and to exercise the right of voting at the forthcoming election’ by a resolution of the Congress in Delhi on 7, September 1922. The Swaraj Party which aimed at wrecking the diarchical Constitution decided to contest the elections and accept office. Therefore, it carried on a forceful propaganda against the Justice Party. However, its gain in 1923 elections was not in any way impressive. But it still affected the fortunes of the Justice Party.

4. Lack of effective propaganda was one of the reasons for the reduced strength of the Justice Party in the Legislative Council.

Nevertheless the Justice Party succeeded in getting 17 of its men nominated as additional members to the Council. With their help it stabilized its position and endeavoured to implement its own schemes and programmes. The second Justice Party Ministry was constituted on 19, November 1923 under the leadership of the Rajah of Panagal who retained A.P. Patro as his colleague but dropped K.V. Raddi Naidu in preference to T.N. Sivagananam Pillai, a Tamil Vellala from Tuticorin and a retired Deputy Collector. Abdullah Ghatal Sahib Bahadur (a Muslim), S.
Arpudaswami Udayar (a Christian), and T.C Thangavelu Pillai were appointed the Council Secretaries in Madras 1924.

This composition of the Second Ministry was obviously an arrangement to satisfy the different linguistic and religious groups. Motives were attributed to the induction of T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai into the Ministry of Justice Party. His nomination as Minister was the reason why Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, O.T.Chetti and other second line leaders felt aggrieved and drove them to the opposite camp.

2.12 The No-Confidence Motion

The formation of the Second Ministry of the Justice Party left so many aspirants to the office of the ministership disgruntled that formed a splinter group under the leadership of C.R. Reddy. This cluster of men styled themselves as ‘‘Democrats’’ and organised the United Nationalist Party. They decided to bring about a no-confidence motion against the newly constituted Ministry. The Chief Minister, the Rajah of Panagal was a past-master in the art of politics. He was ably assisted his colleagues, A. P. Patro, in stemming the tide of the no-confidence motion, moved by C. R. Reddy against his Ministry on 27, November 1923.

The motion of no-confidence was eventually defeated by 65 votes to 44. The Reddy group which consisted of elected members of the Swaraj, Independent and anti-Ministerialist Parties and all the non-official Muslim members, voted in favour of the motion en bloc. Of the 65 who voted against the motion 44 were elected members, 13 were nominated non-official members and 8 were ex-officio and nominated official members. The members remained neutral of whom K. V. Reddi Naidu was one. If the non-official and nominated member had not voted against the motion, the position of the Justice Party would have been precarious. Excluding them,
the Ministerial Party had a bare majority of one. The acrimonious discussion that took place in the Council reflected the conflicts of personal nature and also disclosed that the great non-Brahmin party, due to internal dissension, tended to move towards its nadir.

2.13 The Justice Party Loses its Leading Light

P. Theagaraya Chetti, the leading light of the Justice Party, died on Tuesday 28, April 1925. In his demise, the Justice Party sustained an irreparable loss. He was the one who brought together people of all shades of opinion into one fold; an astute politician and an able organiser he was the acknowledged leader of the Justice Party after T.M. Nair. The success of the Justice Party in 1920 and 1923 elections was solely due to his guidance. His selfless service, sterling character and scrupulous honesty were responsible for his leading position in the party.

The leadership of the Justice Party after the death of P. Theagaraya Chetti, however, devolved on the Rajah of Panagal, the then Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency. The no-confidence motion of C. R. Reddy, which he faced boldly created the necessity of setting the house of the Justice Party in order. From then on, he strove hard to bring some of the old guards like Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar back to the Party. His efforts to rejuvenate the Justice Party did not prove a complete success. Unfortunately it appeared like “a flock of startled sheep each running in a different direction”. However, his leadership at least slowed down its decline.

2.14 The General Election of 1926

The general elections which were due in November 1926 increased the tempo of the activities of the political parties in Madras Presidency. The Justice Party despite its experience in electioneering, proved matchless to the Congress. But its leaders
were robustly optimistic that they would be returned to power again. The Swarajists adopted superior tactics of propaganda. They organised public demonstrations, meetings, and door-to-door canvassing, including bhajan processions similar to those conducted by the Congress in the non-co-operation campaign of 1921. This method of electioneering brought ‘politics down from the Gokhale Hall to the beach, from the club to the street corner’’. But the Justice Party adopted the traditional method of contacting the big-shots of villages and towns and influencing them.

Even for the Congress, the general election of 1926 was not an easy walk-over. Though the campaign was ably organised by a seasoned politician, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, it was difficult for the Swarajists to withstand the communal attacks of E. V. Ramaswami Naicker. At the Kancheepuram conference of the Congress Party, held in 1935, much attention was focussed on the Gurukulam controversy which brought communalism to the forefront of nationalistic politics. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker openly canvassed for the non-Brahmin candidates and used his Tamil Paper, Kudi Arasu., for virulent attacks against Brahmins. His consequent expulsion from the Congress Party increased the intensity of communal propaganda. The Congress leaders were not unaware of the growing sentiments of non-Brahminism within the Congress.

The election to the Central Legislative Assembly and to the Madras Legislative Council took place on 8, November 1926. The Congress secured 41 out of 98 seats and emerged as the largest Party in the Madras Legislative Council. It captured all the 4 seats in the city of Chennai which was supposed to be the stronghold of the Justicites who had recently captured the Corporation from the Swarajists. The Independents secured 36 seats and the Justicites was reduced to 21 which were almost half of its strength in the previous Council. Though the Congress
emerged as the largest Party on the floor of the Madras Legislative Council with 41 seats, it did not have an absolute majority to form the Ministry. The set-back of the Justice Party was glaring. Many of its stalwarts such as O. Thanikacalam Chetti, Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar, K. V. Reddi Nadidu and A. Ramaswami Mudaliar faced failure. However, Panagal was returned with a very narrow majority. It was clear that no party was in a position to constitute a Ministry of its own without the support of the other.

2.15 The Justice Party as a Responsible Opposition

Goschen invited C.V.S Narasimha Raju, the leader of the Swaraj Party to explore the possibility of forming a Ministry. In view of the fact that the Indian National Congress decided not to accept office and to obstruct the operation of diarchy, he declined the offer. As an alternative, the Governor turned towards the Justicites and the Independents. The Rajah of Panagal detested the idea of forming the Ministry in the name of the Justice Party solely because it would be impossible to retain office utterly disregarding the majority of the Swaraj Party. The 37 year old Kongu Vellala barrister and a Zamindar, Dr.Subbaroyan was chosen by Goschen to hear the Ministry. A. Ranganatha Mudaliar, a retired Deputy Collector of Bellary and R. N. Argyasamy Mudaliar, a Roman Catholic and ex-engineer of Public Works Department, were appointed the second and the third Ministers.

The attitude of the Justice Party towards the lame-duck Ministry of Dr.Subbarayan was, at the beginning, terribly hostile. It desired to uphold the democratic traditions that had been ushered in the Council after the introduction of the diarchy by playing the role of a responsible opposition.
2.16 The Simon Commission and the Justice Party

The Act of 1919 had provided that at the expiration of 10 years from the introduction of Montfort Reforms, a Royal Commission should be sent out to India in order to report to Parliament of Great Britain regarding their progress and effects and hence the appointment of the Simon Commission.

The Constitution of the Statutory Commission became the main theme of political discussion in Madras Presidency. The Congress decided to boycott the Commission on the plea that there was no Indian among its members. Though the leading Justicites like K.V. Reddi Naidu and Dr. C. Natesa Mudaliar were against the boycott move of the Congress, the progressive elements in the Justice Party supported it. The controversy as to the boycott of the Commission gained entry into the Legislative Council. G. Hari Sarvothama Rao, a Swarajist, moved a resolution in the Council opposing any co-operation with it. When it was put to vote 61 members favoured it and 12 remained neutral. The Justice Party also voted for the resolution despite the fact that none of its members spoke on it.

Dr. Subbaroyan, the Chief Minister, who thought that it would be worthwhile to co-operate with the Simon Commission voted against the resolution whereas his colleagues A. Ranganatha Mudaliar and Arogyaswami Mudaliar shared the view of the majority of the members of the Legislative Council that the Commission must be boycotted. There arose a constitutional crisis, since a split had occurred in the Ministry on the question of boycotting the Simon Commission. It appears that Dr. Subbaroyan submitted his resignation but forced his colleagues A. Ranganatha Mudaliar and R. N. Arogyaswami Mudaliar to resign their Ministership because they voted in favour of the boycott resolution on 25, January. As the Governor realised the imminent danger of joining together of the Congress and the Justice parties to oust
Dr. Subbaroyan from power he wanted to win back the confidence of the Rajah of Panagal. To please rusticates he appointed M. Krishan Nair, a Justicite from Malabar, the new Law Member. The entire reshuffling of the Ministry with the inclusion S. Muthaiah Mudaliar and M. R. Sethuratnam Aiyar, was perhaps the outcome of the political ingenuity of the Rajah of Panagal. It was only because of the drive that the Rajahh of Pangal gave, both S. Muthaiah Mudaliar and M. R. Sethuratnam Aiyar defected from the Swarajist camp.

The repaired and rebuilt ministerial boat of Dr. Subbaroyan was free from the rough weather. Its real saviour was neither Goschen nor Dr. Subbaroyan but the Rajah of Panagal. To quote C.J. Baker, “In the nine months between this reshuffle of the Ministry and his death, Panagal reputedly enjoyed more power and influence in Government circles than he had done even while as Chief Minister”. With the ascendancy of Panagal, the power and influence of the Swarajists declined.

2.17 The Preliminary Visit of the Simon Commission to Chennai

The attitude of the Justice Party particularly the Rajah of Panagal, towards the Simon Commission changed slowly but perceptibly and tended to be favourable to the idea of co-operation with the Commission, perhaps due to his proximity to the Governor as Ministry-maker.

In an atmosphere of great excitement, the Statutory Commission headed by John Simon came to India in February 1928 to undertake a preliminary survey of the Indian problems. It visited almost all big cities. It reached Chennai on 28, February 1928. They were enthusiastically received by Lord and Lady Goschen, who appeared optimistic with regard to the situation prevailing in Madras Presidency. Representatives of many educational and charitable institutions met the Commission.
The President of the Madras Legislative Council invited the members of the Commission to witness the proceedings. Subsequently, they were introduced to the members of the political parties including the Rajah of Panagal and A. P. Patro.

2.18 The Second Visit of the Commission

The second visit of the Simon Commission to Chennai took place on 18, February 1929. A fitting reception was accorded by the non-Congressites, particularly the Justicites, who dramatically changed their attitude towards the Commission from vigorous opposition to active co-operation. Nearly 500 persons of both sexes who assembled in the compound of the harbour received the members of the Commission with open arms.

In this connection it is appropriate to give the views of the Government of Madras on constitutional reforms. The memorandum which the Government of Madras submitted to the Simon Commission was in many respects a unique document. Its significance lies in its unequivocal condemnation of diarchy as a system of Government. It recommended full provincial autonomy.

2.19 The Irreparable Calamity

The Justice Party, though it regained its lost influence after the reshuffling of Dr. Subbaroyan’s Ministry, suffered an irreparable loss in the premature demise of the Rajah of Panagal on 16, December 1928, the last of the trio of the non-Brahmin Movement, which marked the end of the Justice Party for all practical purposes.

2.20 The Justice Party - Back to Power

Gandhi at the Lahore session of the Congress in December 1929 demanded complete independence to our country. It aroused the enthusiasm of the nationalists
who resolved to boycott the Legislatures as a preliminary step. The fortune of the Congress Party was at the lowest ebb on the eve of the 1920 elections. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee did not participate in the elections to the Legislative Council. The Justice Party, which was hobnobbing with the Ministerialists sometimes and quarrelling with them at other times, fielded 45 candidates. The Ministerialists put up candidates for a majority of seats. Many of them were prepared to support whichever party was successful. The results of the elections were very much in favour of the Justice Party. Some of its foremost members were returned unopposed, and they secured overwhelming majority in places like Vizagapatnam, Chingleput, West Godavary, Bellary, Trichinopoly and Tirunelveli. It was claimed that nearly 70 per cent of the total votes were cast in support of the Justice Party candidates. The Ministerialists were signally defeated at the polls.

Since the Justice Party emerged victorious, the Governor called upon B. Muniswami Naidu, the leader of the Justice Party, to form the Ministry. He assumed office on 27, October 1930 with P.T. Rajan and S. Kumaraswami Reddiar as his colleagues. The victory that the Justice Party won was mainly due to the reorganisation of its set-up and the reorientation of its programmes before the elections. In inviting B. Muniswami Naidu to form the Ministry, the Governor followed the healthy constitutional practice of calling upon the leader of the largest group in the Legislature to form the Ministry. Though B. Muniswami Naidu was capable of dealing with the problems of the State, he found himself miserable in the midst of factions in the party. The selection of his Ministerial colleagues left the Telugu Zamindars headed by the Rajah of Bobbili and the Kumarajah of Venkatagiri aggrieved. The First Minister appeared to them as an anti-Zamindari in outlook. Similarly M.A. Muthiah Chettira, an influential leader of the Nattukottai Chetti
community, a business magnate and a banker who expected a ministerial post, was also dissatisfied. The Telugu Zamindars along with the Nattukottai Chettis organised a Justice ‘Ginger group’ in the Council as early as November 1930 to show their displeasure at the non-inclusion of the Zamindars. The dissensions in the justice party in the latter half of 1932 hardened into a definite schism.

2.21 The Rajah of Bobbili

There was a threat of no-confidence motion against the Ministry of B. Muniswami Naidu from the ‘Ginger group’ of the Party that saw in him ‘a sneaking affection from the Congress and the Swaraists.’ A dramatic turn of events took place. When his own Ministerial Colleagues, P. T. Rajan and S. Kumaraswami Reddiar tendered their resignations, Naidu, suspecting that a motion of no-confidence against him might succeed, resigned his First Ministership, and it was promptly accepted by the Governor. On 5, November 1932, the Rajah of Bobbili was appointed the First Minister. Even after this, the dry bickering continued and tarnished the image of the party. Frantic efforts were made by the Rajah of Bobbili to rejuvenate the party but in vain.

2.22 The 1934 Central Legislative Assembly Elections

The tenure of the Madras Legislative Council, which should have expired on 5, November 1933 in normal course, was extended for another year in view of the impending constitutional changes and also due to the improbability of a new Council under the diarchical Constitution running its full course. The general elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were conducted alone for the first time in November 1934. In response to the decision of the AICC meeting held at Patna in May 1934, the Congress abandoned its Civil Disobedience Programme. It was also for the first time
that the Congress Party had decided to contest the elections under diarchy. So it organised a vigorous election campaign and won a landslide victory.

It was believed that the Justice Party was defeated “not so much by the strength of their opponents’ campaign as by the intrigues of their party colleagues”. Its setback posed a challenge even to its very existence. The leaders began to respond to it immediately by convening a meeting of the party enthusiasts at Branson Baugh, the official residence of the Rajah of Bobbili on Anna Salai, Chennai, to the concerted effort to revitalize the already corroded Justice Party. To patch up the factionalism with the fold of the Justice Party, the Rajah inducted M. A. Muthiah Chettiar into his Ministry when Kumaraswami Reddiar resigned his Ministership due to his failing health in 1936. Nonetheless Rajah Sahib was not able to revive the fortunes of his Party before 1937 elections.

2.23 The Constitution Act of 1935 and its Significance

The Constitution Act of 1935 is a conspicuous landmark in the history of India. It took India nearer to the goal of responsible Government and introduced significant change in the Provincial Administration. It abolished the much-cursed “diarchy” in the Provinces and put into force “Provincial autonomy”, one of the cherished principles of federalism. In six Provinces it created bicameral Legislatures which consisted of lower house known as Legislative Assembly and an upper house called Legislative Council both based on widely enlarged suffrage. The members of the Legislative Assembly were to be elected for a period of five years and the other house was to be a permanent body, one third members retiring every three years.

The Provincial Legislature was endowed with the right of making laws on all subjects who were included in the Provincial List. However the Governor was clothed
with overriding powers. The dismal aspect of this Act was that no Bill passed by the Provincial Legislature could become law without his sent which he could repudiate at his discretion. Issuing of ordinances and dissolving of the Legislative Assembly were some of the powers of the governor. As the highest executive, he was to be asserted by a Council of Ministers that were to be chosen from the majority party of the Legislature. However, the Governor was not to be bound by the advice of his Ministers. Thus this Act envisaged a Provincial Cabinet subservient to the Governor.

2.24 The Ascendancy of Congress to Power

Notwithstanding the fact that the Congress in Tamil Nadu had “a fitful and uneven history” during the era of Civil Disobedience it placed itself solidly in the centre of the political arena. With the passing of a resolution at Fazipur Session in December 1936 the All India Congress decided to contest the elections to the Provincial Legislatures due early in 1937. As a result it abandoned its policy of agitation and suddenly became respectable in as much as there were a good number of aspirants who desire to make use of the organisation for constitutional ends. “From the early years of the decade, some of the most influential and experienced politicians in the Province had shown their disillusionment with the Justice Party by cutting their ties with the party and starting out to seek a vehicle more suited to the political circumstances of the decade”.

The prominent defectors were Dr.Subbaroyan, S.Ramanathan, a close associate of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker and K. Sitarama Reddi of Cuddalore. The triumph of the Congress in 1934 Central Legislative Assembly elections made the political opportunists believe that it would be an easy walk-over for them to win the ensuing elections if they contested as Congress candidates.
2.25 The 1937 Elections

The Government of India Act 1935 provided for the establishment of full responsible Government subject to ‘safeguards’, in the eleven Provinces of British India. The first elections as per the Act of 1935 were to take place in February 1937. When elections were announced their began hectic political activity in the city of Chennai. New political parties were born. Among them the Peoples Party, Madras Provincial Scheduled Castes Party, Madras Presidency Muslim Progressive Party and a resurrected Muslim League were notable. The Peoples’ Party was nothing but the splinter group of the Justice Party, which was started by the Maharajah of Pithapuram, one of the political adversaries of Rajah of Bobbili with a definite purpose to contest elections. With little local organisation this party fielded a large number of candidates.

The Congress Party had already lifted the ban on Council entry. However it facilitated on office acceptance. When Rajaji announced his decision to contest the elections Gandhiji did not believe the new. But he respected Rajaji’s decision because it was his belief that it would definitely benefit the party. To be certain of winning a majority in the ensuing elections for both Houses of the Legislature, the Congress Party contested almost all seats. This election campaign gained momentum of when Jawaharlal Nehru toured Madras Presidency as the President of Indian National Congress in October 1936.

Satyamurti, the master-mind of the Congress in Madras Presidency adopted the technique and style of Jawaharala Nehru and undertook a tour of 9000 miles by car in three months before the elections. The sudden spurt with which he acted stunned his political opponents. He was the only Congress leader who visited most of the Constituencies at least once in the Tamil speaking area of the Madras Presidency.
C. Rajagopalachari also organised an intensive election campaign and displayed extraordinary talents and ability in addressing election meetings. Contrary to his disposition he was eagerly mixing with the public. “On Election Day Congress sympathisers and wealthy candidates provided cars, motor buses and other vehicles to transport voters to the polls; in humbler style, activists led processions of villagers to the nearest polling booth shouting nationalist slogans and waving party flags”. The election campaign of the Congress was unique in many ways. The party activists had gone to the village electors in a way that no other party workers had done.

But at the same time Justice Party was steeped in ‘supine indolence’. The opposition that it gave to the Congress was nominal. There was no regular organisation for the party to carry on the election campaign. The 1934 Central Legislative Assembly elections gave a stunning blow to the Justice Party. As already stated betrayal of the party men was solely responsible for the set-back of the party in the above elections. “Without a party organisation to rival the Congress, the Justice Party conducted a fitful and despondent campaign”. Having lost the morale and confidence, they left the field without gibing stiff resistance to the Congress candidates to facilitate their success. The surging tide of nationalism was perhaps the reason for their whittled enthusiasm. Thus, internal dissension ineffective organisation, inertia and lack of proper leadership took the Justice Party to the brim of disaster.

2.25.1 The Results of the Elections of 1937

In mid-February 1937 the polls took place for four days. The outcome was a landslide victory for the Congress Party. The conspicuous victories of the Party were those of C. Rajagopalachari who got elected from the Graduates Constituency, K.
Kamaraj Nadar who was elected unopposed from Virudunagar, Muthuramaliga
Thevar who won a victory over the Rajah of Ramnad, V. V. Giri (later the President
of India) who defeated the Rajah of Bobbili, the supreme of the Justice Party with a
margin of 6000 votes and Sakti Vadivelu Gounder who vanquished P.T. Rajan, one of
the leading lights of the Justice Party to complete its rout”. The disappointed Justicites
left the political field lock, stock and barrel.

The following table shows the strength of the parties in both Houses of the
Madras Legislature after 1937 elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Party</th>
<th>No. of Seats obtained in the Assembly</th>
<th>No. of Seats secured in the Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justices Party</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Indians</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoples’ Party</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Muslims</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.26 The Surging Tide of Nationalism

The defeat of the Justices Party in 1937 election made it defunct. It was
proved beyond doubt that with its rationalistic stance it was not able to withstand the
mighty wave of nationalism. The vigorous propaganda that the Congressites carried
on against the Justices Party had a tremendous impact on the electorate. Hardgrave
opines: “The Justice Party had straggled itself on the rope it had woven support of the
British Raj had brought it to power, but with the impact of national self-consciousness
and aspiration for Swaraj, its imperial connections brought its defeats”.
2.26.1 The Congress in Power

Though the Congress had swamped the Justice Party after a struggle of seventeen years, it refused to form its Ministry as it demanded “an assurance” from the Governor against the misuse of the discretionary power, vested in him under the Act of 1935. The Congress Party under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari thus created a deadlock by demanding “constitutional freedom in letter and spirit” from the Governor of Madras as per the decision taken at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Wardha on 28, February 1937. Despite the fact that both the Governor and C. Rajagopalachari were keen to break the impasse, they were “baffled and embittered” by their helplessness to find a solution to the crisis which had been created by their superiors’ stubborn attitude.

2.26.2 The Interim Government

The Governor of Madras, who was strongly in favour of forming a Constitutional Government on 1, April 1937, invited K.V. Reddi Naidu of the Justice Party to form a Ministry. In response, as a seasoned and resource administrator, Naidu came forward to constitute a Ministry knowing full well that it was only an interim arrangement. A six member Cabinet consisting of K.V. Reddi Naidu (Premier) A. T. Panner Selvam, M.A. Muthiah Chettiar (Kumarajah of Chettinad) Palat (an independent member from Malabar) M.C. Rajah (the leader of the Depressed Classes) and Khalifulla (Muslim League member from Trichinopoly) came into existence. A Ministry without popular mandate “merely served to caricature the idea of a Madras Legislature without a Congress Ministry” though a programme was chalked out for its formation.
2.27 The Simla Announcement

In the meantime an announcement came from Zetaland, the Secretary of State on 6, May 1937, which broke the Constitutional deadlock, created by the Congress Party by its refusal to accept office. He made it clear on the floor of the House of Lords that “the initiative and responsibility for the whole Government of the Province though in form vesting in the Governor passes to the Ministry as soon as it takes office”. Following this historic announcement a message of the Viceroy, sent from Simla defined the powers of the Governor. He made a plea “to accept this constitution and to work it for all it is worth”. Generally this message was received with favourable reaction in the city of Chennai. On 8, July the Congress Working Committee decided to permit the Congressmen to accept office even though the announcement of both the Secretary of State and the Viceroy feel short of the assurances demanded by it. However, the decision of the Congress to take office was considered by Erskine the Governor of Madras as an “abject and unconditional surrender” by the Congress.

2.28 C. Rajagopalachari’s Ministry

The long planned and much-awaited C. Rajagopalachari’s Ministry assumed office on 14, July 1937. As the head of the Provincial Ministry, C. Rahagopalachari was officially designated as Prime Minister. His Cabinet consisted of the Ministers. Most of his colleagues were his “yes” men accepted one who was no none other than T. Prakasam (popularly known as Andhra Kesari). He was considered the only “real nuisance” in the Madras Ministry. However the exclusion of S. Satyamurti from the Ministry of C.Rajagopalachari was a significant omission. Either his relentless fight against regionalism and non-Brahminism over fifteen years, nor his devotion and
dedication to the principles of constitutionalism nor his unceasing election campaign on the eve of the 1937 elections nor his magnanimity to concede his University constituency to C. Rajagopalachari was taken into consideration. In fact S. Satyamurti’s services to Madras Presidency, particularly to the cause of freedom struggle were not recognised. He was left out of the Cabinet gracelessly. The only reason that was adduced for this notable omission was that his “presence was much more necessary at Delhi where he had already earned his reputation as a Parliamentarian par excellence” Scholars consider this as “supreme political sacrifice” on the part of Satyamurti who won “everlasting glory in the annals of patriotic renunciations.” It is considered a poetic justice that his own disciple, K. Kamaraj was able to keep C. Rajagopalachari out of position after 1954. The induction of S. Ramanathan, a Self-respecter and forceful cavalier of E. V. Ramaswami Naicker into the Ministry startled every Congressman. Curiously he was one of the reliable colleagues of C. Rajagopalachari. As David Arnold remarks “the Congress in Madras settled down to enjoy the exercise of power and the perquisites of office, for so long the forbidden fruit”

Immediately after assuming office the Prime Minister rendered a meritorious service to the cause of freedom struggle by setting free the political prisoners without much friction with the Provincial Governor. This measure speaks of his sagacity and wisdom. The legislations that the Congress Ministry brought forth were in conformity with the policies of the Party. The Prohibition Act of 1937 which was one of the salutary measures of C.Rajagopalachari’s Ministry introduced prohibition in a phased manner. To begin with, it was put into force in Salem District, his own home district and it was extended to other Districts despite the fact it made its own dent on the exchequer.
The Prime Minister was a stout champion of the depressed people. In August 1939 the Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act enacted by the Madras Legislature empowered the Trustees of the temples to throw them open to the Harijans with the approval of the Government. As a result of this measure the Harijans were permitted to enter the precincts of Gods in the Districts of Madurai and Tanjore. Another laudable act of his Ministry was passing of the Removal of the Civil this Disabilities Act to improve the conditions of the Harijans. Accordingly no one belonging to the depressed section of the society could be prevented from enjoying any social amenity which other caste Hindus were entitled to. By a stringent measure C. Rajagopalachari safeguarded the educational interests of the Harijans. Denial of admission to the Harijan students would result in the cancellation of recognition and the refusal of aid to school. Scholarships as well as fee concessions were granted to the students of the Depressed Classes at all levels. Even in matters of employment they were given preference. Some of the measures, taken by the Premier for the amelioration of the Harijans anticipated the present day populist measures.

The controversial Debt Relief Act which aimed at scaling down the debts of the agriculturists, reducing the rate of interest on their future debts and writing off the arrears of rent due to Zamindars, Janmis and other landlords, boosted the image of C. Rajagopalachari as “the protector of peasants”. However he had to face the wrath of his own party men since “the measure proceeded on the wrong premise that all lenders were men of opulence”. It is a pity that many lost their thrifty savings. Notwithstanding the stern criticism, C. Rajagopalachari had the courage to get it approved by the Viceroy. Though the Ministry was in power for a period of two years and three months it extended many special favours to the poor which “included land revenue concessions” famine, flood and cyclone relief; village reconstruction which
consisted to water supply, rural medical scheme and revival of rural games; tenancy reform; public health measures, education facilities and religious and charitable endowments.” The financial constraints that the Government experienced forced it to resort to fresh taxes and to adopt frugalities in administrative expenses.

2.29 The Introduction of Hindustani

Anyone who has seen C. Rajagopalachari opposing Congress as its arch enemy and fighting against the imposition of Hindi as a protagonist of Tamil language in the 1960’s would be startled to know that it was he who introduced Hindustani on 21 March 1938 as a compulsory language in 125 Schools from standards VI to VII giving the students “the option to learn it in either script – Devnagari (Sanskrit) or Urdu. Though learning of Hindustani was made compulsory, failure in it would not deter the promotion of a student to higher class. By this measure C. Rajagopalachari had opened the Pandora’s Box which threw the Presidency of Madras in political turmoil. The champions of Tamil language took this measure of C. Rajagopalachari as an affront to Tamil culture and its hoary literary tradition. The opposition to Hindustani came mainly from non-Brahmin leaders who were either of the Justice Party or of the Self-Respect Movement. They reacted with violent protest. This agitation came later to be labelled as Anti-Hindi agitation. But the advocates of Hindi argued that “a national language as the lingua franca of India was a prime requisite to achieve national unity”. Hindi was characterised as a “symbol of nationalism”.

A strong rebuttal came from K. V. Reddi Naidu who presided over the Anti-Hindi Conference at Kancheepuram. He observed: “To us, Dravidians, Hindi is as much a foreign language as English and the worst of it is, it is a language which cannot claim any antiquity or any great development; the earliest Hindi literature is
dated to 13th century whereas in Tamil Tholkapiam was written twenty centuries before”. On another occasion he cited the example of Switzerland where three languages – German, French and Italian – were given the equal status of official language and argued that it was not at all necessary to have a single language, namely Hindi, to achieve national unity. The non-Brahmin leaders associated Hindustani with Aryan culture and anything Aryan was Brahmin for them. In other words they identified Hindustani with Brahmins and suggested that C. R. had introduced Hindustani as compulsory language in order to provide employment opportunity to Brahmins as Hindi Pundits.

Not only Self-Respecters and Justicites opposed the introduction of compulsory Hindustani into the Schools of Madras Presidency but also Tamil Scholars like S. Somasundara Bharathi took up cudgels to defend the cause of Tamil language. Under his leadership a Madras Provincial Anti-Hindi League was formed and it chalked out the programmes of Anti-Hindi agitation. In the beginning the League decided to adopt civil disobedience and non-violent methods in fighting against the introduction of compulsory Hindustani. In the meanwhile Anti-Hindi agitation took several forms. In mid May 1938 the volunteers of Anti-Hindi agitation pocketed before the residence of the Premier. The picketers, inspite of their peaceful agitation were arrested and convicted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the same weapon which the Britishers used against the non-co-operators as well as Satyagrahis of Civil Disobedience Movement. The press levelled scathing criticism against the harsh measures that the Government of Madras employed against the Anti-Hindi agitations. The Governor of Madras, while sending a fortnightly report to the Viceroy on 10, June 1928, mentioned his genuine fear that” the repressive measures of the Congress Government might lead to undesirable political
consequences. The next picketing place was in front of the Hindu Theological High School, situated in George Town where the picketing was carried on by women agitators. The agitation entered upon a new phase when the women participated in the struggle. The statistics collected by the Home Department show that 536 persons were arrested and convicted for taking part in the Anti-Hindi agitation by the end of 1938. The agitation continued unabated when it was spearheaded by E. V. Ramaswami Naicker who was thrown into prison in November 1938. Thereupon “Naicker’s image was given a big boost”. It was only during this period E.V. R was given the appellation “Periyar” and his ardent follower C. N. Annadurai (later the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu) gained a wide-spread popularity as ‘a skilful agitator, propagandist and organiser’. At this juncture the Rajah of Bobbili, the leader of the Justice Party withdrew from active politics. As a result the leadership of the Party devolved on E.V.R. while he was undergoing imprisonment. His incarceration instead of mitigating the Anti-Hindu agitation gave it a fillip. However on health grounds Naicker was released from prison on 22, May 1939.

2.29.1 C. Rajagopalachari’s Resignation

In the meantime the Second World War broke out. The Viceroy declared India a belligerent country. The Congress Party took exception to the announcement which meant that India was dragged into the war without the consent of the people and without consulting the legislative bodies. The Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha on 14, September 1939 passed a resolution calling upon the Provincial Governments to tender their resignations. Accordingly C. Rajagopalachari Ministry had resigned on 27, October 1939 but it was only on 30, October that the Governor accepted the resignation. No interim Government was installed. Instead,
the Governor assumed the powers of the Legislature and delegated the authority to three advisors chosen from the Civil Service. The resignation of Congress Ministries in seven States clearly showed that the leaders of the Congress were not for loaves of office and they had enough vigour and vitality to fight the British Imperialism by remaining out of office. It had been amply proved that they could shoulder administrative responsibilities at any time as the Congress organisation had veterans like C. Rajagopalachari, in its rank and file.

Though, C. Rajagopalachari held the position of the Premier of Madras Presidency for a short span of time he had not failed to project his personality as an astute politician capable of withstanding any stormy political weather. Truly he was one of the most talented administrators that Madras Presidency had ever produced and he proved that he was not second to anyone including the British administrators in the maintenance of law and order. To quote Erskine, C. Rajagopalachari was “a sort of dictator and in fact runs the whole show”. “Once the leading No-changer Rajagopalachari was now acclaimed by British commentators as the ablest Congress parliamentarian”

With the resignation of the Congress Ministry, E. V. R. suspended the Anti-Hindi agitation and as the leader of the Justice Party he offered an unconditional and unqualified support to Great Britain in the prosecution of the war. The Government of Madras remained silent over the language issue because the Viceroy hesitated to “undo a policy decision of the Congress Ministry”. Owing to the continued persuasion of the Governor, the Viceroy at last agreed for the abolition of the compulsory study of Hindi in schools in the beginning of 1940. However, Hindi was retained in schools in both higher and lower classes as an optional subject.
2.29.2 The Congress Became a Mass Movement

The Congress was transformed into a mass Movement under the dynamic leadership of Gandhiji when his philosophy of non-violence and Satyagraha reached the common man. The Party looked to him for guidance and direction. It was made clear by the Congress Working Committee that it was not prepared to render its cooperation to a war which was carried on imperialist lines. It demanded at least a National Government to be set up at the Centre if the cooperation of the Congress in the war efforts was needed.

2.29.3 The August Offer

With a view of ending the political impasse, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow issued a statement on behalf of the British Raj on 8, August 1940, which is well known as the “August Offer”. It made two significant proposition: (1) to enlarge the Viceroy's Executive Council so as to include more Indians and (2) to appoint a Constituent Assembly to frame a new Constitution for India. But the Viceroy refused to grant the demand for National Government as it was not acceptable to the Muslims. Gandhiji considered this “offer” as quite unsatisfactory and launched his famous Individual Civil Disobedience. His anti-war speeches in the village of Paunar made him suffer three months’ imprisonment. Jawaharlal Nehru followed suit. But he was arrested even before he began his campaign. Unjustifiably he was sentenced to four years’ rigorous imprisonment for a speech which he made at Gorakhpur. This unduly severe punishment provoked Gandhiji who extended the scope of the Individual Satyagraha to every village thereby making it a nation-wide Movement.

The city of Chennai witnessed protest meetings, herbals and demonstrations condemning the conviction of Nehru. The students of Schools and Colleges gave a
new dimension to the Movement by organising strikes in many parts of the 
Presidency. They took active part in the “Nehru Conviction Protest Strike”. The 
administrators of both Andhra University and Annamalai University faced a difficult 
situation in tackling the strikers.

Unfortunately the Individual Satyagraha was criticised by leaders like S. 
Srinivasa Iyengar who described Gandhiji’s creed of non-violence as ‘’a gospel of 
cowardice’’. It is sad that he left the Congress organisation due to difference of 
opinion with Gandhiji’. Despite the mixed reaction from stalwarts such as P.S. 
Sivaswami Iyer, the individual Satyagraha captured the imagination of the people and 
it was organised in every nook and corner of the Presidency. Anit-war propaganda 
was effectively carried on by pamphleteering, displaying posters and making speeches. 
Consequently a large number of people were arrested and thrown into prison for 
different terms. The press was also muzzled.

2.29.4 C. Rajagopalachari’s Imprisonment

C. Rajagopalachari was a well-known Satyagrahi. His March to Vedaranyam 
which finds a parallel in Gadhiji’s Dandi trek made him pre-eminently popular. It was 
the Salt Satyagraha that made the Congress organisation a mass Movement. Similarly 
the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement increased the tempo of freedom 
struggle. The unqualified support that some of the non-Congressmen gave to the war 
efforts of the British Raj displeased C. Rajagopalachari. Therefore, he wrote letters on 
1, December 1940 to the members of the Provincial War Committee including the 
leader of the Opposition in the Madras Legislative Assembly, Kumararajah Muthiah 
Chettiar who was then the Mayor of Madras Corporation beseeching them not to 
render any help either with men or with money to the Britishers. Thus C.
Rajagopalachari was sentenced to one year imprisonment. Ten days later, S. Satyamurti followed suit. Nine months’ simple imprisonment was “the reward” given to him by the Government. When he was undergoing the sentence in Vellore jail he became terribly sick and a necessity arose on the part of the authority to shift him by the Government. When he was undergoing the sentence in Vellore jail he became terribly sick and a necessity arose on the part of the authorities heft him to the General Hospital in Chennai. It is distressing to reveal that this “renunciated patriot” was treated during the time of his illness merely as “a prisoner under police custody”.

The list of Individual Satyagrahis had in the meanwhile grown long. The former Ministers of C. Rajagopalachari’s Cabinet and the leading members of the Central Legislative Assembly viz., C. N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, T. S. Avinashilingam Chettiar, P. S. Kumaraswami Raja courted arrest. Leaders like M. Bakthavatchalam and N. G. Ranga were among the notable participants of his Movement. People of various spheres came forward to participants of his Movement. People of various spheres came forward to take part in these anti-war Individual Satyagraha activities. Among them T. S. Chokkalingam, Editor of Dinamani, a Tamil Daily, S. S. Vasan, Editor of Ananda Vikatan, a Tamil Weekly, and a remarkable novelist, R. Krishnamurti, Editor of Kalaki, a Tamil Weekly were conspicuous journalists. Renowned Tamil scholars such as T. P. Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and M. P. Sivagnanam also displayed their sense of patriotism by offering Satyagraha and courting imprisonment. The number of persons arrested in Tamil speaking region went up to 424. The amount of money that was collected as fines was Rs. 29,030. The Satyagraha campaign continued for a year and a half. Congress high command decided to put up a relentless fight for freedom. However, the enthusiasm for
Individual Satyagraha started waning because the political prisoners were treated as ordinary criminals.

In the meantime the Japanese aggression in the Pacific region went unchecked. They overran Malaya and advanced towards Burma. To the dismay of the Allied Powers, Rangoon fell into the hands of Japanese on 8, March 1942. Panic and phobia reigned everywhere. The security of India was in real danger. The British made conciliatory overtures to the Congress as the situation warranted a new approach towards its demand. On 11, March 1942 i.e. three days after the fall of Rangoon, Winston Churchill, and the Prime Minister of England announced that Sir Stafford Cripps, the leaders of the House of Commons would be sent out to India to meet the leaders of various political parties and to discuss the constitutional change to be brought about in the Government of India. It was unfortunate that Cripps virtually repeated the August Offer. He had not given any hope of immediate change in the governance of the country. However, he promised to accord Dominion Status - and also to organise a Constituent Assembly for framing a new Constitution for India at the end of the war. Both the Congress and the Muslim League repudiated his proposals. The Cripps mission ended in fiasco. The sincerity of a labour leader like Cripps in breaking the impasse was not understood in the proper perspective either by the Congress or by the Muslim League.

2.29.5 A Complete Volte-face by C. Rajagopalachari

C. Rajagopalachari was a pragmatic politician. He realised that a National Government was not possible unless Congress conceded that formation of separate Muslim State viz., Pakistan as “the two nation theory” of Jinnah caught the fancy of, the Muslim Community. So he convened the Madras Legislature Congress Party on
24, April 1942 and placed his views before its members who passed the famous ‘Madras Resolution’ endorsing his opinion. This resolution created a feeling of acrimony and asperity among the top leaders of the Congress Party such as Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Gandhiji. At the AICC meeting of Allahabad Rajaji confronted the gloomy countenance of his colleagues. Maulana Azad expressed his deep disapproval on C. Rajagopalachari’s independent attitude. It was the view of the Congress high command that Rajaji ought to have conferred with his party colleagues at Delhi before he moved a resolution at Provincial level. However C. Rajagopalachari was old enough to sponsor a resolution in the AICC meeting itself supporting the creation of Pakistan but it was defeated by a large majority of 120 votes to 15. His posture was considered as anti-congress. Nonetheless C. Rajagopalachari’s courage was matchless. He neither felt disheartened by this defeat and nor harboured any feeing of animosity towards his colleagues who disagreed with him. It is lamentable to note that the Provincial Legislature Party which was once at his beck and call, passed a vote of censure against him for his anti-Congress activities and “rescinded the previous pro-Pakistan resolution”. The no-confidence motion which led to his resignation was considered “an unpleasant episode” in the history of both the Presidency and India”. But C. R. was not guilty of “a breach of discipline”. This was very well known to Gandhiji who had uttered on more than one occasion that “even his worst enemy would not accuse Rajaji of any selfish motive”. His large-heartedness towards the Muslims was solely responsible for his advocacy of separation so that the Hindu-Muslim unity could be preserved. Thereafter he lost his popularity among his party men and the bulk of Congressites of the South gave him “their respect but not their obedience”.

The Anti-Hindi agitation of 1938 had a profound impact on the subsequent history of Madras Presidency. It gave a new lease of life to the Justice Party which became inert after its defeat in 1937 elections. The leadership of E. V. R. facilitated the merger of the Self-Respect Movement with the Justice Party. He visualised in the introduction of Hindi and attempt to subjugate the Tamilians to Aryan (Northern) Imperialism and he genuinely felt that this kind of humiliation could be averted through the creation of a Dravidian State. It cannot be ruled out that E. V. R. was attracted by the two-nation theory, propounded by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, in Lahore session of the Muslim League. In the same way at the Justice Party Conference convened on 2, June 1940 held at Tiruvarur E. V. R passed a resolution demanding a Sovereign Independent Dravidastan consisting of the four Southern States. Despite his unqualified support to the British Raj, his pet scheme of Dravidastan did not receive any attention from the Government of Fort St. George. Desperately he sought the help of the Muslim League of Madras for the trifurcation of the Indian sub-continent into "Aryastan", "Dravidastan" and "Pakistan". In this connection he met Mohammed Ali Jinnah at Bombay who was reported to have advised him to prove his strength thorough electoral politics. It is an irony that he had already annihilated the political character of the Justice Party for a separate Sovereign Independent State like the one which the Muslims demanded was that the non-Brahmins of the southern states – Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam – belonged to an ethnic stock and culture viz., Dravidan which was distinctly different from Aryan Brahmin race.
2.31 E. V. R’s Political Career

E.V.Ramaswami popularly known as E.V.R. is closely associated with social history of Tamil Nadu. E.V.R’s political career up to the time of his canonisation as the ”Periyar” (Great one) of the Tamils in 1939 falls into three phases. The first phase begins with his election as the Chairman of the Municipality of his home town, Erode. He remained in that office between 1917 and 1919. He was compelled to resign because of an accusation that he used his official position for his own personal interests. But Dr.Nambi Arooran adduces that he resigned his chairmanship protesting against the atrocities committed in Jallianwalah Bagh. The recent records disprove this theory. The Second phase starts with the joining the Congress in 1919. He campaigned vigorously for temperance and Khadi and courted imprisonment twice. He came to limelight as political agitator, when he offered Satyagraha in protest against the custom forbidding the untouchables to use the roads in and around the temple at Vykom in Travancore State. The Travancore Durbar threw him into prison twice but it was forced to remove the prohibitory order. E. V. R. returned to Chennai as Vaikkam Virar. (The hero of Vykom). His popularity did not fail to evoke the antagonism of the Brahmin leadership of the Congress in Chennai. The Gurukulam affair was a major controversy which projected E. V. R. as the champion of the non-Brahmins. Finally his advocacy of reserved seats for non-Brahmin in the legislative council at the Kancheepuram Conference in 1935 led to his break with the Congress. Hence, his Self-Respect Movement. By this time Dravidian nationalism gained strength and he came under its spell. The third phase commences with his entry into the Justice Party. He justified his hopped off to opposite political camp by saying that he was forced into this extreme step by the Brahmin domination of the Congress Party.. After the debacle of the Justice Party in 1937 elections, the
leadership of the party devolved on him. He took that party away from its original path. It amounted to the destruction of its political character. Thereafter this Party boycotted electoral politics and its secular disposition was also thrown to winds, as he turned out to be a strong advocate of atheism. Above all the provincial autonomy which Justice Party vociferously demanded was given a twist and a new slogan of Independent Dravidian State was raised. The futility of this demand was not realised even by the scholar-statesman C. N. Annadurai till the hammer stroke of Anti-secession Act fell on them in 1963. The Justice Party which had a moribund existence under E. V. R. died at last in 1944 when he changed its nomenclature into Dravida Kazhagam.

2.32 Self-Respect Movement

The Self-Respect Movement or Suya Mariyathai Iyakkam of E. V. R. was nothing but the ‘‘radicalization of Dravidian ideology,’’ which was already advocated by the Justicites. It sought to restore ‘‘the Self-respect of non-Brahmins which was alleged to have been denied to them by Brahmins.’’ Its twin aims were (1) giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past and (2) denying the superiority of the Brahmins, accorded to them under Varnashrama Dharma. Eugene F. Ischick precisely states the aims of the Self-Respect Movement as follows: “One goal of the Self-respect Movement was nativist - to get rid of ‘foreign’ Brahmins. The other goal was revivalist – to restore Tamil society to a presumed pristine state of true equality”. In other words it was against the Brahmin domination but it was for ‘‘the Self-respect and identity of non-Brahmins by fighting Brahmin domination at all levels – religious, cultural, social and political’’.
In an article written in Kudi Arasu as early as 1929 it was explained “why the Self-Respect Movement came into existence”. The Self-Respect Movement came into existence only to teach a real truth of the ancients; a truth that existed where there were no difference between people and justice existed between people. It comes only to save the society. Some cheats had taken advantages of the ignorance of our people; of the poverty of our people and instilled in them so many Shastras and Puranas and told them they were low caste. This Movement comes only to assist the Shastras which said that there was only one God for the entire Universe.

“The Self-respect Movement comes to tell that God is common to all whether they are high or low caste people, whether they are strong or weak”.

Two pamphlets entitled, Namadu Kurikkol published in 1929 and Dravida Kazhaga Elatchiyam published in 1948 speak of the objectives of the Self-Respect Movement. They are to help disseminate useful knowledge of political education; to allow people to live a life of freedom from slavery to anything against reason and Self-respect; to do away with kinds needless customs, meaningless ceremonies and blind superstitious beliefs in society; to put an end to the present social system in which caste, community and traditional occupations, based on the accident to birth, have chained the mass of people, and created superior and inferior classes, and to give people equal rights; to completely eradicate untouchability and to establish a united society based on brotherhood; to give equal rights to women; to prevent child marriages and marriages based on law favourable to one sect, to conduct and encourage love marriages, widow marriages, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages and to have the marriages registered under the Civil Law and to establish and maintain homes for orphans and widows, and to run educational institutions.
2.33 Progress and Growth of Self-Respect Movement

To spread the gospel of this Movement E. V. R. founded a Tamil Weekly, Kudi Arasu on 2, May 1924. It became the official organ of the Self-respect Movement. He explained the purpose of this weekly as follows: “It was to put across his frank views on various socio-political matters, to rouse the social consciousness of the common man, to propagate and popularise the concepts of social equality and fraternity and finally to eradicate the caste system”.

For similar purpose an English Weekly called Revolt was started by his Colleague, S. Ramanathan but this paper did not live long due to its poor circulation. However, E. V. R. gave encouragement to the growth of newspapers in Tamil supporting the tenets of the Self-Respect Movement as a means to enlarge its area of influence. Puratchi (Revolt) Pakutharivu (Rationalism) and Vidudhalai (Liberty) were some of the journals started subsequently to disseminate the ideals of Self-Respect Movement.

Under his patronage, the Self-Respect Movement had grown in size and importance. It had enlisted a large number of young workers, started many branches, and a Council was chosen at the Erode Conference. At its meetings it had evolved a sophisticated programme of social and religious reform which not only rejected Varnashrama Dharma, caste suffixes, untouchability, Brahmin priests and privileges derived from birth but also proposed new and cheaper birth, but also proposed new and cheaper form of marriage, machinery for divorce, equal property rights for women, prohibition, diversion of temple wealth to education and other practical uses, and Government intervention to secure equal civic and social rights for all.
2.33.1 An Estimate

The name of E. V. R. has gone into the pages of history of Tamil Nadu more as a social reformer than as a political leader Non-Brahminism in his hands acquired a militant form. In this respect he could be compared with Mahatma Phule, the founder of Satya Shodak Shamaj in Maharashtra. His attempt to introduce atheism as a concept of Dravidian ideology met with a little success.

As a rationalist he applied the dry test of reason even to the fundamental principles of Hindu culture and religion. In this respect he profoundly lacked the larger vision of other great social reformers. This fact has been realised by his ardent disciple, C. N. Annadurai who talked of religion in a more mellowed tone after he founded his party, D. M. K. "The one god and one community” theory of Tirumular has been well adopted by him as one of the fundamental ideologies of his party. However, the non-Brahmins have, to a larger extent, boycotted Brahmin priests and have given up meaningless rituals and rites due to E. V. R.’s ceaseless attack against superstitious beliefs. Chanting mantras in Sankrit has almost become out of date in Tamil society.

“The anti-Brahmin Movement has had many outstanding leaders. Periyer’s uniqueness lies in his powerful personality, and his concentrated “zeal in fighting Brahmins”. The fact that Periyar was active on the propaganda scene until a week before he died at the age of 94 speaks of his perseverance. His personality, as reflected in his teachings carried three traits viz., “boldness, independence, self-reliance and persistence even obstinacy”.

The observation describing Periyar an institution by himself is very much nearer to truth. Periyer was more than an individual. A matchless hero, with
undaunted courage and tenacity “he stood against and fought back the combined
tirade of the Brahmin hierarchy and reactionary conservatism.”

2.33.2 The Quit India Movement

The last and the final agitation against the British Raj was the Quit India
Rebellion. It was indeed “a mass Movement on the widest possible scale”. To quote
Pattabi Sitaramayya it was “an open rebellion”. In the historic session of AICC which
was held in Bombay at Gowalia Tank maiden, the Indian National Congress passed a
resolution reiterating the Wardha demand for “Swarajya”. But this time Gandiji gave
a new slogan viz., “Quit India” which meant nothing more and nothing less than a
complete transfer of power to Indian hands. He was firm on launching once again his
non-violent non-co-operation struggle against the British Raj. Addressing the
gathering for over two hours in both Hindi and English, Gandhiji said: “Now I take up
the delicate task of leading you in this struggle. Not as a commander but with fear of
God in our hearts and with the knowledge that India’s freedom cannot wait any
longer”

Despite the fact that the Congress had not launched any real offensive, the
Government of India by making use of the Rule 20 of the Defence of India Rules
came down heavily on the Congress organisation. At the dawn of 9, August, 1942
almost all Congress leaders were thrown into prison and the organisation, i.e., Indian
National Congress, for the first time, was declared an illegal body. Gandhiji, who was
to have addressed a public meeting at Shivajipark, Bombay that evening, was taken
into custody and sent to Poona and lodged in Yeravada Central Prison.

The leaderless nation witnessed civil unrest and in almost all Provinces the
spate of violence continued unabated. Assauls and sporadic disorders such as
damaging telegraph and telephone lines, removing railway tracks and ransacking
stations were the lines of action that the public adopted in several parts of the country. Sabotage, arson and incendiaries were the order of the day. The city of Chennai presented a turbulent spectacle of hartals, strikes, and all kinds of violent deeds. The young college students who were frenzied with a fiery sense of freedom were in the forefront of the agitation. They abstained from classes. The educational activities and institutions like Loyola College and Pachaiyappa’s College were greatly impaired. The students of these Colleges staged demonstrations and obstructed electric trains but they were mercilessly lathicharged. Some of them did not hesitate to court imprisonment. The students of Presidency College, Chennai behaved in the same way. On 12, August they organised a meeting and passed a resolution condemning not only the arrest of Gandhiji but also the lathicharge on students. In this agitation the participation of the students of Annamalai University was significantly clamorous. It was then an institution of composite culture. The students of various linguistic groups organised a protest meeting in the campus where they delivered thunderous speeches in their respective mother tongues denouncing the arrest of Gandhiji. The most daring of their activities was the hoisting of the national flag. Another significant development of this struggle was the participation of women students. A striking incident was that the girls of Queen Mary’s College, Chennai conducted hartals and took out a procession shouting slogans, of ‘’Quit India’’ all along their way until they were chased away by Police Constables.

The labourers had also taken up the cause of the Quit India Movement. The Buckingham and Carnatic Mills had to close its shutters due to labourers’ strike. The workers of the Madras Port Trust, Madras Electric Tramway and Madras Corporation participated in the agitation. Picketing of toddy shops was one of the methods of agitation launched by the nationalists. An orgy of violence resulted in setting toddy
shops of fire in Choolai, burning of several post boxes and throwing an incendiary bomb of Muthialpet Police Station. The situation became worse in Districts.

The Government of Madras unleashed strong measures of repression. Public meetings were banned; processions were stopped; collective fines were imposed on some villages which offered support to the Movement. The press was silenced. Numerous agitators were shot dead. The official estimate gives the following statistics: 6000 people were arrested; 18000 detained without trial; 940 killed and 1630 injured through Police or military firing during the last five months of 1942 in the whole of Indian Sub-Continent. These repressive measures outwardly put down the Quit India Movement. However the political climate continued to be sullen and gloomy. There can be no gainsaying that “the Rebellion of 1942” prepared the ground for Independence in 1947. This anti-British agitation made the British Governments both in Delhi and London realise that their rule was no longer wanted in India. Had the British failed to find soon a way of handing over the power smoothly there would have been a revolution to drive them out. It was evident that a deep and widespread anti-British feeling ran high after 1942, mostly created by the revolt of that year. The Congress leaders remained in jail till the end of the Second World War in 1945. Lord Wavell’s efforts to put an end to the political impasse met with failure. However the ban on Congress was lifted and the leaders were released.

It was the good fortune of India that in the general elections held in July 1945 in Great Britain the Labour Party won a big victory. Winston Churchill, an obstinate imperialist was defeated. Clement Atlee became the Prime Minister of England. Pethic Lawrence who was appointed the Secretary of State took the initiative to break the constitutional deadlock in India. As a consequence the Cabinet Mission reached Delhi on 24, March 1946. Its constitutional proposal was accepted in good faith by
the Congress. This paved the way for holding the general elections in the Provinces and formation of the interim Government at the Centre. In the meantime C. R. re-entered the Congress much to the chagrin of K. Kamarah who was then the President of TNCC. Gandhiji, Sardar Patel and Azad were responsible for his re-entry into the Congress because they gave credence to ‘his past sacrifices, political wisdom, loyalty, integrity and ability’. In the elections held in April 1946 the Congress received a massive mandate.

The following was the party position in the Legislative Assembly of Madras:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Party</th>
<th>Seats secured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeans</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant seats</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for the tremendous victory of the Congress despite its internal factions was the boycott of the election by Dravida Kazhagam which functioned more as a social reform Movement than as a political party. The Congress Legislature Party of Madras Presidency elected T. Prakasam as its leader, after a contest, which formed his Ministry on 30, April 1946. He was a true Gandhian. Therefore he translated some of hot Policies of the Congress into action, immediately after assuming office. He carried out a big scheme for the promotion of Khadi, enforcement of prohibition and eradication of untouchability. Gandhiji appreciated his work and paid a glowing tribute. Nonetheless he became unpopular among his
party men who were critical of his overbearing attitude. Instead of appeasing his critics, he attributed motives to them. He never considered the criticism of his administration as the reflection of public opinion. But he characterised it as ‘‘malicious propaganda’’. This led to his downfall.

O. P. Ramaswamy Reddy, the Deputy Leader of the party became Premier of Madras Presidency on 23, March 1947. Lord Mountbatten succeeded Lord Wavell and assumed office as the Viceroy of India on 24, March 1947. He was entrusted with the task of transferring the responsibility of the Government of British India to the Indians in a manner that would best ensure the future happiness and prosperity of free India. Soon he made out a plan which set the stage for a happy ending of British rule in India. None the less it was received with mixed feelings by the people of India. Jinnah’s cry for Pakistan weighed heavily in its favour. It was, however, generally agreed that the scheme of Lord Mountbatten gave the best practicable solution to the Indian problem. Without any alternative both Congress and Muslim League accepted the vivisection of India. The Indian Independence Bill was passed by the British Parliament on 1, July 1947 without any voice of dissent, fixing 15, August 1947 as the date of freedom. The Constituent Assembly, which was elected by the Provincial Assemblies in July 1945, met in a special session at mid-night on 14-15, August 1947 to declare the Independence of India. When the world was fast asleep India awoke at the stroke of the midnight hour to keep its ‘‘tryst with destiny’’. The Constituent Assembly completed its task of framing a new Constitution for the people of India in three years. India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic on 26, Jan 1950. In the first general elections held in 1952 the Congress Party contested 367 seats out of 375 but won only 152 for the Madras Legislative Assembly. Many of its prominent leaders were miserably defeated. Its defeat in Andhra Pradesh
was glaring. Kala Venkata Rao, Gopal Reddy and Sanjeeva Reddy were among the
defeated candidates. Since the Congress party did not have a majority in the Madras
Legislative Assembly the political situation in the Presidency appeared to be
nebulous. Though the leaders like T. Prakasam aspired for the office of Chief
Ministership it was not possible for him to mobilise a majority in a chamber of 375.
At this juncture Nehru urged C. R. to lead the Congress Party even though he was not
a member of either House of the State Legislature. As an astute politician C. R. was
ready to shoulder the responsibility of the leadership of the Congress Legislature
Party in Madras Presidency. Events then moved fast. The Governor nominated him
to the Madras Legislative Council in order to fulfil the constitutional obligation and
invited him to form the ministry. In order to ensure stability he secured the support of
Commonwealth Party, headed by N.A. Manikkavelu Naicker, which won six seats in
the Assembly.

The ship of State had to face however a turbulent weather since the Andhra
Movement for a separate state for Telugu speaking people gained momentum.
Andhras became very desperate and their discontent over this problem was growing
every day. In this situation, Potti Sriramalu began a fast unto death on 19, October
1952 in Madras in support of this demand and he continued his fast for 58 days and
died on 15, December 1952 as a lamentable soul without achieving the purpose for
which he undertook the fast. The death of Potti Sriramalu, like a volcanic eruption,
spread lavas of violence throughout Andhra region. Lawlessness reigned everywhere.
The Vijayawada Railway Station was raided by mobs. Wagons were looted. Police
resorted to firing to quell the violence. It took four days for the Government of
Madras to restore normalcy in the Andhra districts. On 19, December Jawaharlal
Nehru, the Prime Minister, announced the decision of Government of India to carve
out an Andhra State consisting of the Telugu speaking areas of the composite Madras State excluding the city of Chennai. The new Andhara State came into existence on 1, October 1952 with Kurnool as its capital. T. Prakasam, a veteran Telugu leader, became the first Chief Minister of the newly-formed Andhra State. N. Sanjeeve Reddy (later the President of India) was nominated as the Deputy Chief Minister. However he was allowed to retain the leadership of the Legislature Party of Andhra Pradesh.

C. Rajagopalachari who was well-versed in statecraft, had the courage to face any political situation. The Andhra agitation had not made him in any way dispirited. It was only due to his political diplomacy and sagacity that the city of Chennai was retained in Tamil Nadu. The Andhras were keen to get it at least vivisected. But for the tenacity and the relentlessness of C. R. in putting up a strong case in favour of its retention as the capital of Madras State, like Tirupati it would have been lost.

As a far-sighted statesman C. Rajagopalachari sought to introduce a scheme of education based upon the occupation of the parents of the students. This measure sparked off a great controversy. It was suspected that he had brought forth this scheme only to perpetuate Varnashrama Dharma and to prevent social mobility by forcing the children of different non-Brahmin communities to follow their own traditional professions. A campaign of vilification was carried on against him by the opposition parties. The leaders of the non-Brahmin political parties such as Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) launched a bitter agitation against the proposed legislation. Some of his adversaries in the Congress party, instead of “exploring the possibilities of compromise and persuading C. Rajagopalachari to drop, the unpopular measure took the opportunity to get rid of him”. His opponents went to the extent of complaining that his regime was one of nepotism and favouritism to the members of the Brahmin community. No less a
person than K. Kamaraj who was then the President of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee took up the cudgels against C. Rajagopalachari. Finding the situation not very congenial Rajaji tendered his resignation in April 1954. K. Kamaraj who had already armed the appellation of “King-maker” took over the reins of power from C. Rajagopalachari.

2.34 K. Kamaraj – Men of the Masses

As a shrewd politician K. Kamaraj immediately commenced the work of consolidating his position as the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency. Despite the fact that he was hardly 50 years of age, he was already a “heroic figure” in the political arena of Madras Presidency. He was popularly known as “a Sanyasi in white clothes”.

Attracted by the philosophy of Gandhiji, he joined the Congress party in 1920 and participated in all the agitations launched by him such as Non-co-operation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movements. He courted imprisonment six times and languished in prison for over 3000 days for the sake of country’s freedom. Unlike C. Rajagopalachari he was “the man of the masses”. He was a trusted colleague of S. Satyamurti and lent unqualified support to him in his fight against C. Rajagopalachari. In the 1937 general elections as stated earlier he was elected unopposed to the Legislative Assembly form Virudunagar. In 1940 he was chosen as the President of the TNCC. He had the privilege of being elected to the Constituent Assembly which framed the Republican Constitution of India.

2.35 Conclusion

To ensure a stable administration and to have a comfortable majority in the Legislative Assembly, K. Kamaraj sought the support of the Toilers Party headed by Ramaswamy Pandayachi and Cuddalore and offered him ministership, thereby he
paved the way for merger of his party with the Congress. K. Kamaraj was a person without a sound formal education and he was the first non-English knowing Chief Minister to head the administration of the state in India. He was essentially a rustic personality. However he had picked up a little English during the period of his imprisonment between 1942-45. He knew only Tamil, to speak and to write with little amount of proficiency. Yet he proved that he was one of the most efficient administrators that Independent India has ever produced. He was noted for mass contact. He visited every village of his State. He knew the people and the land very intimating. It was this closeness to the people which helped K. Kamaraj avoids electoral defeat till 1967. R Venkataraman, his cabinet colleague and letters the President of India, had stated once about Kamaraj’s people-oriented approach to administration: “He has never allowed any laws, rules or regulations to stand in the way of doing the right thing. Often times during the course of administration many came and represented against the tyranny of some executive orders. He was advised by officialdom that the requirements of rules, laws and regulations had been complied with and the consequent situations were either inevitable or irremediable. On those occasions when Kamaraj felt that the grievances were genuine or that the hardships should be remedied, he never hesitated to have the rules changed or the regulations modified in order to see that justice was done”.