CHAPTER V

RISE OF REGIONAL POLITICS

The Home Rule Movement created an awareness among the people of the Madras Presidency about the need for Self-Government. But the Brahmanical influence and domination resulted in a reaction on the part of the members belonging to the non-Brahmanical sections. Even in the Indian National Congress there was Brahmanical domination. The educated middle class of professionals and businessmen found the doors of the Congress closed to them. Hence they focused their attention to the social and political emancipation of non-Brahmins as a prelude to the attainment of political rights. The dissatisfied non-Brahmin merchant community ridiculed the Home Rule agitation and the reform proposals of the Home Rulers. They wanted to have an organization to ventilate their grievances.

The population of the Madras Presidency during that time was about 41½ millions. Out of this, 40 millions were non-Brahmins. But the Brahmin minority appropriated to themselves almost all the Government jobs and dominated the professions\(^1\). For instance, in 1912, the Brahmins, who were 3.2% of the total male population secured 55% of the appointments as Deputy Collectors, while the

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non-Brahmin Hindus, forming 85.6% of the total male population had only 21.5% of the appointments\(^2\).

There were many divisions among the non-Brahmins themselves such as non-Brahmin Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Among the non-Brahmin Hindus, there was a distinction made between the non-Brahmin caste Hindus and untouchables. The division was also partly on the basis of occupation. Among them there were rich zamindars and wealthy landowners as well as the poorest cultivators and landless labourers\(^3\). The interest of these sections diverged widely, and in many cases were contradictory. It was practically difficult for all the non-Brahmins to come together and organize a movement for the upliftment of the members of their community\(^4\).

**Formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation**

However in 1909 the Madras Non-Brahmin Association was formed by two non-Brahmin lawyers called P. Subramanian and M. Purushotam Naidu\(^5\). It was conceived purely as a social progressive organization. Later it was called the Madras Dravidian Association. It included every caste and race in the Madras Presidency but the Brahmins\(^6\). This Association could not last for want of good organization.

Undeterred by the failure of the Madras Dravidian Association, a sizeable group of the non-Brahmins decided to establish an organization to voice their

\(^3\) G.O. No.87, 31\(^{st}\) October 1917, Legislative Dept.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Madras Mail., 3\(^{rd}\) June,1909.
grievances and to secure a fair deal in the affairs of the government. Accordingly in 1912 they started the Madras United League with C. Natesa Mudaliar as its Secretary. In 1913 the League had a membership of 300 persons, who actively involved themselves in the task of educating the people. Subsequently the Madras United League changed its name into the Madras Dravidian Association.

This Association conducted regular meetings to discuss the problems relating to the non-Brahmins. In 1915 the non-Brahmins published a book in Madras entitled ‘Non-Brahmin Letters’ which contained twenty-one letters. In July 1916 the Madras Dravidian Association established a hostel for the non-Brahmins in Madras city called “Dravidian Home”. The Madras Dravidian Association became very popular among the non-Brahmins. It attracted the attention of the non-Brahmins politicians too.

The birth of Home Rule League coincided with hectic activities connected with the non-Brahmin movement. The Home Rule Movement induced a few wealthy non-Brahmin leaders to form a strong political organization to achieve their political ends. At a conference held on 20th November 1916 it was resolved to start a company for publishing a newspaper advocating the cause of the non-Brahmin community and also a political association for safeguarding the interests of the same community. In accordance with this, a Joint Stock Company was started under the name of ‘South Indian People’s Association’ for conducting a

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9 Nambi Arooran, K., op.cit., pp.42.ff.
daily newspaper in English, Tamil and Telugu\(^\text{11}\). Further P. Theagaraya Chetty and some other non-Brahmin leaders founded the South Indian Liberal Federation in 1916\(^\text{12}\).

**Non-Brahmin Manifesto**

With the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation in 1916, the institutional embodiment of the differences between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins became apparent. The new organization of the non-Brahmins was purely a political organization and had its basis in the hopes and fears created among the politically conscious members of the non-Brahmanical communities on the eve of the grant of a substantial measure of self-government in 1919\(^\text{13}\).

Justice C. Sankaran Nair held the view that unless the barriers of Varna and Jati were removed, political progress would be impossible\(^\text{14}\). The views of the non-Brahmin leaders were spread by the English daily called ‘Justice’ and two other vernacular papers namely ‘Dravidan’ in Tamil and ‘Andhra Prakasika’ in Telugu\(^\text{15}\). The South Indian Liberal Federation condemned the Indian National Congress as the Party of the Brahmins, sought the attainment of responsible government through constitutional method and demanded justice for the Dravidian communities. The South Indian Liberal Federation prepared a manifesto defining the attitude of the important non-Brahmin Indian communities of the madras

\(^{11}\) The Hindu, 20\(^{th}\) December, 1916.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., pp.314-22.


Presidency, towards the home Rule Movement. It was issued in December 1916 under the signature of P. Theagaraya Chetty, the President of the South Indian Chamber of Commerce, the oldest member of the Corporation of Madras and an ex-legislative Councilor.

In January 1917, confidential communications were sent to leading men inviting them to join the South Indian People’s Association. In the same month, the leaders of the movement bought a press for about Rs.40,000 and started negotiation for the purchase of the ‘Indian Patriot’. The name of the newspaper was to be changed to ‘Justice’, and its Policy was determined by the directors. On 21st January, 1917 a meeting was held in Madras to discuss how the interest of non-Brahmins could be advanced. The object of the paper ‘Justice’ was to promote the social, economic, political, educational, material and moral welfare of the people of the Madras Presidency in general, and of the non-Brahmin Hindu community in particular.

When the Home Rulers rejected the non-Brahmin manifesto, the non-Brahmin leaders appealed to the members of their community. Large number of land-holders and zamindars supported the cause of non-Brahmin leaders. Public propaganda against the Brahmins was vigorously carried on by the vernacular journals. It was pointed out that in order to check the predominance of the Brahmins, some kind of communal representation in state services should be

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16 Ibid., p.302.
18 Fort nightly Report, Madras, 17th January, 1917.
19 Fortnightly Report, Madras, 2nd February, 1917.
20 G.O.No.122, 17th October, 1919, Legislative Dept.
secured. The idea of communal representation, however, was thought of only in respect of service under the state.

The non-Brahmin Manifesto made it clear that the non-Brahmins formed 40 to 40 1/2 % of the population, but remained without political influence. Secondly, it stressed the need for the revision of the constitution of India, and legislative freedom. Thirdly, it advocated progressive political developments towards self-government. Fourthly, it considered the Home Rule as an extreme claim and unsuitable one to the existing condition. Lastly, it wished that the post-war scheme of reforms should give communal representation to the non-Brahmins.\(^{21}\)

**The Justice Party**

The South Indian Liberal Federation, in due course, came to be known as ‘Justice Party’ after the name of its English daily ‘Justice’. The objectives of the Party were embodied in a constitution issued in 1917.

They were,

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

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

\(^{21}\) Justice Party Golden Jubilee Souvenir, pp.1 ff.
c. to disseminate by public lectures, by distribution of literature and by other means sound and liberal views in regard to public opinion\textsuperscript{22}.

**Propaganda Warfare**

Soon after the formation of the Justice Party, vigorous propaganda was started by the paper ‘Justice’. T.M. Nayar served as its editor and publisher\textsuperscript{23}. The first issue of the daily was issued on 26\textsuperscript{th} February, 1917. The second daily, the ‘Dravidan’, printed in Tamil, was also begun in mid-1917, edited by N. Bhaktavatsalam Pillai, A.C. Parthasarathi Naidu was the editor of the Telugu daily ‘Andhra Prakasitka’. Funds for the support of the newspapers and for the activities of the South Indian Liberal Federation were collected from among the landed interests of the presidency, and with in a year its fund swelled to more than a lakh of rupees\textsuperscript{24}.

The Justicites attacked the Home Rule Movement, the Swarajist policy and the Congress Movement through their press columns. They argued that Home Rulers as well as the Congress leaders belonged to the Brahmin community. The choice of Sanskrit or Devanga script was considered as an imposition of Brahmanism\textsuperscript{25}. The non-Brahmins also attacked ‘New India’ and ridiculed its editor (Mrs. Besant) as an Irish Brahmin and as a leader of the Madras Brahmins\textsuperscript{26}.

Further the ‘Dravidan’ requested the Government that the Home Rule League should be condemned as unconstitutional. It also questioned the loyalty of

\textsuperscript{22} Madras Mail., 18\textsuperscript{th} October, 1917.
\textsuperscript{23} Irschick, E.F., op.cit., p.51.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.51.
\textsuperscript{25} Nambi Arooran, K., op.cit., p.200.
\textsuperscript{26} Non-Brahmin, 14\textsuperscript{th} January, 1917 and 28\textsuperscript{th} January 1917.
the Home Rulers. As the paper became pro-British, it held that Home Rule could be granted to India only when all the Indians demanded it without distinction of caste and creed. Further, it advocated that the English rule was indispensable for the progress of India and the British were rendering invaluable help to the forty million people of India. The only administrative reform necessary for India was to enable people of all castes to have the same privilege under the Government. This was the only measure stressed by the South Indian Liberal Federation. The grant of anything more than this would do more harm than good to the country.

Non-Brahmin Conferences

Along with the journalistic barrage, the Justice Party began holding conferences to set up branches throughout the Presidency. The first and one of the most important of these conferences was organized in Coimbatore by two party members J.A. Ramalingam Chettiyar and S.A. Somasundaram Pillai, a vellala. Plans were announced months in advance. The congress conference was also held in the same period on 20th August, 1917. In London, on the same day, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, made an announcement in the House of commons favoring grant of self-government for India by stages. This hardened the differences in the Madras Presidency politics.

The announcement of Montagu was followed by a series of non-Brahmin Conferences in different parts of the Madras Presidency to urge moderation in

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29 Dravidan, 22nd December, 1917, MNNR, p.20.
30 Ibid., 11th January, 1918, MNNR, p.125.
reform so as to secure training for self-government and equal opportunity for all groups in the community. A conference of non-Brahmins was held in Madras in December 1917, in which over 1,500 delegates participated. It passed a unanimous resolution that any step taken for introducing responsible government in this country which would not provide for the full representation of the non-Brahmins on a communal basis could not be acceptable to the Justice Party.

When Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy and Montagu, the Secretary of State for India came to Madras in December 1917 to discuss the reform with local leaders, the Justice Party presented an address to the Viceroy restating its political views. It was in favour of political reforms but not outright grant of self-government. In fact, they demanded that the Legislative council should be expanded and as an experiment the departments of local-self-government, agriculture, sanitation cooperative credit and industries could be placed under the control of the Legislative Councils. Since then the non-Brahmins began to gather mass support and infused awareness among themselves by sponsoring Zillah Conferences in which the local non-Brahmin leaders also took an active part in moulding the Dravidian consciousness.

On the second day of the non-Brahmin Zillah Conference held at Coimbatore, eleven resolutions on various problems were passed. The conference offered heartfelt prayer for the success of the British in the First World was (1914-1918). Measures were insisted on free and compulsory education, communal

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35 Madras Mail, 3rd December, 1917.
representation, gradual reforms and moderation in demands. T.M. Nair, speaking at the conference, said that the sentiment of the non-Brahmins had been existing in the country for generations and that it was openly expressed then because non-Brahmins were looking to the British government for protection and justice against the designs of the Brahmins whose object was to determine British influence and power in this country.

The second Conference was held at Bikkavel in the Godavari Zillah presided by Chellapillai Kumaraja on 27th and 28th October 1917. M. Venkataratinam Naidu gave the welcome speech. It was the first conference held in the Zillah of Godavari attended by 2000 members. In this conference the President lucidly expressed the history of the origin of the non-Brahmin movement.

The third Conference started on 3rd November, 1917, and lasted for two days at Pulivendala of Cuddappah Zillah. K. Subba Reddiar commenced the Conference. P. Durai Swami Naidu, in his welcome address, vividly outlined the Brahmanical outrages in various field, against the non-Brahmins. T.M. Nair and Theagaraya Chettiyar of Madras also attended the Conference.

The fourth Conference was held at Bezwada on 11th and 12th November, 1917 with Theagaraya Chetty as President and K.V. Reddy Naidu as the Convener of the Reception Committee. The leaders expressed several views. P. Theagaraya Chetty explained that one of the reasons for the success of Alexander’s invasion

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36 Madras Mail, 21st August, 1917.
37 Ibid., 22nd August, 1917.
39 Irschick, E.F., op.cit., p.52.
was the disunity among the Indians. He also criticized the Brahmanical ways and their customs and demanded equal opportunity for the non-Brahmins too.  

The fifth non-Brahmin Conference was held at Tinnevely under the leadership of Theagaraya Chetty on 3rd December, 1917. Over one thousand members and thousand volunteers attended the conference including some zamindars of Tinnevely region. This Conference was the first of its kind in the Tinnevely area, known for its bravery and patriotism in the past.

The sixth non-Brahmin Conference commenced at Salem on 9th December 1917. K.S. Durairaj presided over the function. He explained the benefits of the British rule and condemned the measures of exploitation adopted against the non-Brahmins. The President also stressed that the Home Rule movement was a Brahmin movement, and that if Home Rule were granted, it would be a Brahmin rule and that the Brahmins would squeeze the non-Brahmins.

The Non-Brahmin Confederation

The South Indian Non-Brahmin confederation held in Madras city on 28th and 29th, December 1917 witnessed the growing political awareness among the non-Brahmins. The meeting was held at Willingdon Theatre at Mount Road, Madras in which over 1,500 delegates participated. As Theagaraya Chetty fell ill, Tirumalai Pillai presented his report on his behalf. The following matter were discussed.

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40 G.O.No.122, 17th September, 1919, Legislative Dept.
41 The Swadesamitran, Madras, 10th December, 1917, MNNR, p.47.
42 The Dravidan, Madras, 11th December, 1917, MNNR, p.48.
43 Andhra Prakasiks, Madras, 10th December 1917, MNNR, p.48.
44 Desabhaktan, Madras, 29th December, 1917.
The Government should give importance to primary education through Tamil and other Dravidian languages in lieu of Sanskrit and English education\(^{45}\).

Ryots should be provided with lands and other facilities.

a. Fee for technical education should be reduced.

b. The non-Brahmins should be given appointments in the public services.

c. The Panchayat system was to be developed.

d. Existing malpractices in public places must be stopped.

e. The religious traditions left by Kambar, Ramanuja, Buddha and Valluvar should be preserved\(^{46}\).

Nineteen resolutions were passed on the second day of the conference held on 29\(^{th}\) December 1917. The first resolution required loyalty to the British Government. T.N. Nair brought the second resolution urging further political progress. The conference discussed the principles of communal appointment and communal representation in various fields such as railway service, education, local self-government and handicrafts\(^{47}\).

**The Meston Award**

The various non-Brahmin Zillah Conferences and Confederations gradually broke the exclusiveness and power of the Brahmin citadels by de-sanskritization of Dravidian languages. The formation of the Justice Party, provided a catalyst to a

\(^{45}\) Nambi Arooran, K., op.cit., P.85.

\(^{46}\) G.O. No.854-55, 19\(^{th}\) September, 1918, Public Dept.

\(^{47}\) Desabhaktan, 29\(^{th}\) December, 1917.
new cultural awakening among the Tamil people\textsuperscript{48}. When the Rowlatt Act was passed, and Mahatma Gandhi gave a call for Satyagraha to protest against it, the Justice Party remained unmoved. It agitated strongly for communal representation and demanded determination of the number of seats to be given to Brahmins and non–Brahmins\textsuperscript{49}.

Both the Brahmins and non-Brahmins failed to arrive at a settlement, for they had deep differences over the issue of reservation of seats. Two conferences were held to mitigate their burning problems. C.P. Rama Swamy Aiyer, a Brahmin leader vehemently opposed the reservation of seats and stood for scraping it. Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras finally advocated 50% reservation of seats to the non-Brahmins. Not satisfied with it, P. Theagaraya Chetty demanded 75% of the seats for the non-Brahmins\textsuperscript{50}. A non-Brahmin deputation was sent to England to present its case for communal representation before the Joint Select Committee in London in the summer of 1919. With very great difficulty only the deputation managed to make a representation to the Joint Select Committee.\textsuperscript{51}

The outcome of the Joint Select Committee hearings was the ‘Meston Award’,\textsuperscript{52} which granted 28 seats out of 65 non-Muhammadan general seats,


\textsuperscript{49} The Hindu, 6\textsuperscript{th} February, 1920.

\textsuperscript{50} The Dravidan, 30\textsuperscript{th} April, 1919.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{52} Lord Meston was appointed as an arbitrator by the Government of India, at the request of the Government of Madras, to solve the non-Brahmin issue.
although the Justicites asked for 40 reserved seats in the Madras Legislature.\textsuperscript{53} Dissatisfied at this the non-Brahmin leaders organized meetings to express their antagonism. The Congress leaders too dubbed the Meston Award as a pro-Brahmin one, aimed at building a Brahmin Oligarchy.\textsuperscript{54} It was under these circumstances the Justice Party suddenly reversed its stand, considered the Award as a political victory and decided to contest in the forthcoming general elections.

The rise of regional politics in the Madras Presidency was certainly a sad development. But it was rather inevitable. Feelings of caste superiority among the Brahmins and their predominant position in the province provoked the so called lower castes. As there was a wide spread political awakening throughout the country in consequence of the growth of western education, it was only natural that the lower classes aspired for equality of opportunity along with the Brahmins. In this endeavour the Justice Party offered its leadership to the non-Brahmanical sections of the community.

\textsuperscript{53} David Arnold, op.cit., p.19
\textsuperscript{54} Saraswathy, S., op.cit., pp.76ff